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"There's many a one who oft has heard
The name of Robert Kyd,
Who cannot tell, perhaps, a word
Of him, or what he did.

"So, though I never saw the man,
And lived not in his day,
I'll tell you how his guilt began—
To what it led the way."

H. F. GOULD.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

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TO

THE AUTHOR OF THE

"WINTER IN THE WEST,"

CHARLES FENNO HOFFMAN, ESQ.,

THESE VOLUMES ARE,

WITH SENTIMENTS OF ESTEEM,

Respectfully Inscribed.

PREFACE.

THE following dramatic romance consists of two acts, with an interval of five years between them. The time and action of the first part, the scene of which is placed in the south of Ireland, are comprised in something less than three days; that of the second, the scenes of which are laid in New-York Bay and on its adjacent shores, embraces a somewhat longer space of time, the two comprising the most prominent crises of the hero's life—one giving the colouring to the whole of his subsequent career, which in the other is brought to its close.

Natchez, Miss., Jan., 1839.

BOOK I.

THE CAUSE.

"A lady should not scorn
One soul that loves her, howe'er lowly it be."

BARRY CORNWALL.

"'Twere idle to remember now,
Had I the heart, my thwarted schemes.
I bear beneath this alter'd brow
The ashes of a thousand dreams—
Some wrought of wild Ambition's fingers,
Some colour'd of Love's pencil well—
* * * * * * * *
Ambition has but foil'd my grasp,
And Love has perish'd in my clasp."

Melanie.

CAPTAIN KYD;

OR,

THE WIZARD OF THE SEA.

BOOK I.

CHAPTER I.

"Oh, bold Robin Hood
Was a forester good
As ever drew bow in the merry green wood,
And what eye hath e'er seen
Such a sweet maiden queen
As Marian the pride of the forester's green."

On a rocky headland that stretches boldly out into the bosom of one of the lakelike bays that indent the southern shore of Ireland, stands a picturesque ruin, half hidden to the eye of the voyager amid a group of old trees. With its solitary square tower, and warlike battlements jagged and stern in their desolation, it still wears an air of imposing grandeur, that conveys some idea of its ancient baronial state. It is known by the name of "old Castle Cor;" and in its palmy days was the summer abode of the last Earl of Bellamont.

On a bright morning in the merry month of May, in the year sixteen hundred and ninety-four, its now silent halls rung with the joyous voices and noisy sports of a score of gallant youths and noble maidens, gathered there, from many a lordly roof both

far and near, to celebrate a rural fête in honour of the sixteenth birthday of the only child of this ancient house, the beautiful Kate Bellamont, better known throughout the barony as "wild Kate of Castle Cor." In the pastimes of the day, archery, then much practised by ladies of gentle blood, was to hold a conspicuous place, and a silver arrow was to be awarded to the victor by the hands of Lady Bellamont herself. As the hour of noon approached, the earl's chief forester, Cormac Dermot, his gray locks covered with a red cloth bonnet, in which was fastened an eagle's plume, and his goodly person arrayed in a holyday suit of green and gold, made his appearance on the lawn by the west side of the castle, and wound his horn, loud and long, as the signal that the "gentle sporte of archerie" was now about to begin.

The place chosen for the trial of skill was an ample lawn of the softest and greenest verdure, lying between the wall of the castle and the verge of the cliff. A few ancient oaks grew here and there upon it; and towards the south it was open to the land-locked bay and far-distant sea, which, wide as the vision extended, seemed to belt the horizon like a shining band of silver. At each extremity of the field, one hundred yards apart, was pitched upon the sward a gorgeous pavilion, one of blue, the other of orange-coloured silk: the hangings of the former were fringed with silver; and from the festooned curtains of the latter pended tassels of silk and gold. In these were laid tables spread with cloths of crimson damask, and covered with every luxury that could tempt the palate or gratify the eye. From the summit of one of the pavilions fluttered a crimson banneret, displaying the arms of Bellamont, its boar's-head crest pierced through with an arrow, emblematical of the

occasion; and from the top of the other waved a white banner, in the centre of which, according to the rules of heraldry, a bow, quiver, target and other signs of archery were tastefully emblazoned.

Twenty-five yards in front of each pavilion, two targets were placed, fifty yards apart, so that, after sending all their arrows at one, the archers might walk up to it and gather them, and, taking their stand by it, shoot back to the other; thus alternately reversing the direction of their shots, and adding healthful exercise to their graceful pastime. The targets were both very beautiful, and gay with colours; being round wooden shields half an inch in thickness and three feet in diameter, with four circles painted on the faces: the outer white, with a green border; the next black; the next within it orange; and the inner circle red, encompassing a gold centre. They were elevated, at a slight angle, twenty inches from the ground, on a light frame resembling a painter's easel.

Midway between the targets, but safely placed several paces back from the erratic path of the arrows, was erected beneath an ancient linden-tree a sylvan throne, surmounted by a canopy of silk, elaborately worked with the needle to represent Diana, with her nymphs and hounds, pursuing a herd of deer with flights of arrows. This was the seat of the umpire of the sports—Katrine, the lovely Countess of Bellamont. Altogether, it was an imposing and gorgeous scene; and, with its stern castle rising boldly from the verdant lawn topped with battlements and towers; with its boundary on the north side, of green, dark old woods, and the calm, deep bay beneath, with a yacht sleeping on its bosom; with its extended prospect of the illimitable sea for-ever breathing with a mysterious life, the field of archery at Castle Cor, for the natural

beauty of the spot and the taste displayed in its adornment, has doubtless had no parallel in the annals of archery.

Scarcely had the echoes of old Cormac's horn died away in the forest, startling many a stately stag to flight, when the castle poured forth its gay throng of archers towards the lists. In their midst was the Countess of Bellamont, escorted by a body-guard of young archeresses. She was then in the prime and beauty of ripe womanhood: at that delightful age when the wife and mother, all the charms of mind and person fully developed and refined by taste and elegant culture, fascinates by a thousand nameless graces, and captivates and enslaves even the youthful crowd that sigh at the feet of her lovely daughter of seventeen—the age that leaves one in doubt whether beautiful women arrive at the zenith of their beauty and power under five-and-thirty.

This was the age of Katrine of Bellamont; and though at eighteen (when she became a bride) the loveliest of all Irish maidens either of gentle or lowly birth, yet now, as the Countess of Bellamont, far-famed for her rare and stately beauty. She was arrayed in a simple white robe; and a laced jacket of royal-purple velvet closely fitted her magnificent bust. When she entered the field she was conducted by her juvenile escort to the throne, on which she seated herself, and with a playfully assumed queenly dignity that became her highborn air. A coronet of pearls graced her brow; and her symmetrical hand, that rivalled pearls in its soft transparency, gracefully held, like a sceptre, the miniature arrow which was to be the prize for excelling in archery. Her deep blue eyes, as she looked around, reflected, in a thousand smiling beams, the joy that danced on each youthful face,

and the sunny light of her own countenance communicated sunshine of the heart wherever it fell.

On each side of the throne stood a wellborn youth habited as a page, and behind her were stationed two beautiful young girls attired as sylphides. On her right hand, a few feet in the rear, leaning on a yew bow six feet in length, stood Cormac Dermot, his stag's horn, richly inlaid and curiously carved with woodland devices, slung beneath his left shoulder, with the mouthpiece brought round in front ready for use. A little farther beyond, and nearer the castle-wall, was assembled a group of lower degree, consisting of under-foresters, retainers of the household, and neighbouring peasants; while on the opposite side of the lawn might be seen, relieved against the sky, the forms of two or three fishermen, whom curiosity had led to climb the dizzy precipice from the beach—far along the white line of which were visible their scattered huts, looking like black specks upon the sand.

All was now animation with the preparations for the lists. From bundles of bows thrown by Dermot on the ground before each pavilion, the youths began busily to select weapons for the fair archers, who were themselves earnestly engaged in choosing arrows from quivers that were hung on the front of the tent; fastening braces of thick fawn's leather on their left or bow arm just above the wrist to preserve it from injury by the rebound of the bow-string; and drawing on the right hand, from parcels handed them by pages, shooting-gloves, with three finger-stalls, fitted with a strap and button to fasten at the wrist, to protect their fingers in drawing the arrow. Besides these appendages of archery, each archeress wore a belt buckled about the waist, to which pended a tassel of the softest floss of Brussels, to wipe away

the soil that adhered to the arrows when drawn from the ground; and also an ivory box with a metal lid, containing a perfumed paste for anointing the finger-stalls of the shooting-gloves and the brace on the arm, that the bow-string might the more easily quit the fingers and pass over the guarded wrist. A small pouch, either of tortoise-shell or of silver, in shape and dimensions like a sportsman's cup or a dicebox, was suspended on the right side to receive two or three arrows; the more cumbersome quiver, while in target-shooting, being left on the ground near at hand, filled with shafts to replace those broken or lost.

The party of archeresses consisted of seven fair girls, the eldest scarce seventeen. They were fancifully attired, some in green, and others in orange or blue hunting-jackets, after the tasteful fashion of the period; a costume admirably calculated to display their sylphan shapes. They all wore hats of the colour of their spencers, looped up in front, and ornamented with waves of snowy plumes. Long white trains descended from their waists to the ground, but, in shooting, were gathered beneath the belt on the left side, and, thence falling down again to the feet in numerous folds, added to the grace and picturesqueness of their appearance. Each archeress was attended by a favoured youth as an esquire, habited in a green or gray hunting-frock, bordered with a wreath of embroidered oak-leaves, with an arrow worked in silver thread on each lappel. They wore broad flapping hats, turned boldly back from the forehead, and shaded in front with a drooping black plume. Each carried a short hunting-spear, decked with ribands of the colour of his mistress' jacket, gifts from her own hand and tied thereon with her own fingers, in token that she acknowledged him as her "Esquire of the Bow." The duty

of these youthful cavaliers was to select a bow suited to the strength of the archeress whose colours they wore; to fit it with an arrow of a weight proportioned to its power, having a nock exactly receiving the string; to assist, if the lady is unskilled, in stringing the bow; to draw the arrows from the butt, or collect the far-shot shafts and return them to the owner; and otherwise, as courtesy and gallantry prompted, to do their duty as "esquires of archerie."

Once more the sonorous horn of old Cormac was heard winding, now high, now low, in a long, wild strain, and then ending in three sharp blasts, like the stirring notes of a bugle sounding to the charge. Every archeress now had her brace buckled on her arm, and her shooting-glove buttoned about her wrist; every one had two good arrows in the pouch at her belt, and a third on the string; and each fair girl, attended by her esquire, hastened to the stand by the southernmost target at the sound of the forester's horn—save, in each instance, Kate Bellamont! Her brace would not buckle all she could do; her shooting-glove would not go on, and three, that she had pulled off, were lying rent at her feet; and not an arrow was to be seen in her tortoise-shell pouch, though half a dozen fair ones lay about her on the ground! It was very plain that something was going wrong with the maiden. Such a dilemma could not have happened without a cause. The braces of the rest buckled with ease; their shooting-gloves fitted beautifully; and there had been time enough to fill twenty pouches. Why, then, was Kate Bellamont not ready? Her brace, both strap and buckle, was perfect; and the wrist it was destined to compass was not to be matched for its smallness of size! The gloves, plainly were just what they should be!

Her companions had been fitted, and her hand was the smallest as well as the fairest of the party; besides, there were a dozen pairs on the ground that evidently were made for no other hand. The cause could not lie in the arrows, for they were, to the eye, without fault, and of every variety of shape and fashion known to archery; nor in her handsome esquire, who, save when requested by some eager girl to assist her, had been diligently serving her with arrow after arrow, until he had emptied two quivers, the contents of which now lay strewn around. The cause is not to be found in either of these. The truth is, Kate Bellamont was playing with her little foot against the ground when she should have been trying on her glove. No sooner was one pulled half way on than she suffered it to remain so, drumming the while in a fit of absence on the sward, while her eyes followed the motions of her handsome esquire. The next moment, recovering herself, she would tear it off impatiently, and, with a laugh, fling it to the ground. She would then take up another, and go through the same process, or play with her brace instead of buckling it; and when the young gentleman gave her an arrow, without scarcely touching it to the bow-string she threw it down, saying it was too heavy or too light, too long or too short, had too much feather or had not feather enough; so that, when the rest of the party were ready, Kate Bellamont was just where she was at the outset. The result of all this, whether brought about designedly or not by a little female manœuvring, being a question to be solved by such as are skilled in the ways and means by which women work out their ends, was, that when the last notes of Cormac's horn died away in the forest, Kate Bellamont found herself and her esquire, the noble and youthful heir of the broad lands of the

earldom of Lester, left quite alone. The brace was on her arm unbuckled, and she held a glove in her hand.

"Lord Robert, do clasp this troublesome brace for me. Strange you could not see what difficulty I have had to get ready! But I suppose you were so engaged fitting an arrow to pretty Gracy Fitzgerald's bow, that you had no eyes for any one else!"

This was said half in pique, half laughingly; and holding, with a pouting lip, her snowy arm towards her esquire as she spoke, he gallantly received it, and with the merest effort in the world clasped the rebellious brace. But he did not release her soft hand without giving it a slight pressure, and looking into her face with an eloquent gaze, which she consciously met with eyes half downcast, yet beaming through their long dark lashes with a gentle fire that young love only could have kindled.

"Now, Sir Esquire, fasten this glove."

The youth bent till the black plume of his bonnet rested on her arm, and, with some difficulty apparently, for he was a very long time about it, succeeded in buttoning the silken strap across the blue-veined wrist; nor did he lift his head from the fair hand, which lay nestled like a bird in his beneath the thick covert of his drooping feather, ere he had touched it with his bold lip.

"Ha, Sir Forester, is this a part of your service as squire of archery?" she demanded, with the blood mounting to her cheek in maidenly surprise; though the pouting smile on her mouth, which she vainly tried to turn into a frown, and the dancing light in her telltale eyes, betokened anything besides resentment at the bold deed; "I see I must resign you to my sly little cousin Gracy, and take her well-

behaved esquire; doubtless you better understand her humour than you seem to do mine."

By the time she had ended she had succeeded in calling up a small cloud on her brow, which struggled very hard to cast a shadow over the sunny light that played around her lovely mouth and was reflected back in a thousand rays from the deep wells of her black, Castilian eyes.

"Forgive me, sweet Lady Kate," said the esquire, dropping on one knee—disguising his attitude to the eyes of others by gathering carelessly one or two arrows from the ground—to her eyes alone a suppliant. The expression of his face amusingly wavered between playful mockery and seriousness, as if greatly fearing, yet doubting much, that his daring act had really given offence: a sort of neutral ground between mirth and grief, with the advantage of enabling him to fall readily into the one or the other, as he should find the needle of her humour pointed.

"See, then, you offend not again, sir," she said, laughing at the troubled expression of his serio-comic countenance. "Haste! choose me an arrow that tapers from the pile to the feather."

"One that tapers each way from the middle will suit you better for shooting in this light wind," said the young esquire, the puzzled play of his handsome features changed to sunshine by her voice. As he spoke he brought a quiver full of arrows and poured them out at her feet, and, kneeling on the thick verdure, selected an arrow of the kind he had named.

"No, no," she said, putting it aside; "they always curve from the line of sight; and, besides, fly unsteady."

"Not in a wind, Kate. The fulness in the middle counteracts the weight of the ends, and drives it more evenly."

"Do as you are bidden, Sir Esquire," she said. "Don't think now you are going to have your own way." A second arrow was placed in her hand by the youth.

"Why, Lord Robert, what *is* the matter with your wits! This is an arrow of the same kind; and, besides, it is without a cock-feather. I shall have to call yonder handsome fisher's lad, who is watching me so admiringly, to my assistance."

The esquire, without looking up, mechanically handed to her a third arrow, with the head broken and the feathers ruffled. Without being able to speak in her surprise, she looked quietly down and beheld the young man so intently contemplating one of her exquisite little feet, that twice she spoke to him ere he looked up to encounter her gaze of arch astonishment. It was very plain what had become of her esquire's wits. The youth blushed, and hastily rose to his feet; but the maiden could not disguise a little female vanity, though she shook her finger at him, and said mischievously,

"Do you propose becoming a cordwainer, and making me a pair of slippers, Lord Robert, that you are so busy taking the dimensions of my foot?"

"I would willingly become apprentice to the meanest cobbler, to be suffered to take the measure of that tiny foot, and fit it with a shoe," said the youth, with gallantry.

The maiden laughed, and, unwilling to betray the feeling his words had created, said, "Do be quick, Lord Robert; my bow is not yet strung with our foolish idling here, and I shall be too late for the lists."

As she spoke she grasped her bow firmly in the middle, and extending her hand, containing the string terminating with a loop, to the upper limb, she pulled smartly upward, pressing the limb down-

ward at the same time with her left wrist, and skilfully and accurately carried the eye of the bowstring into the nock. Her bow, like those of her companions, was five feet in length, neatly made of dark wood highly polished, and rounded on the inner side to increase its power in shooting.

"Well and featly done! That's a tough yew, and a man's strength could not have better done what your little fingers, with skill to guide them, I have just seen do. You were an apt pupil, young mistress, and do honour to old Dermot's lessons."

Kate Bellamont turned and saw the old forester close at her side. "If I have any skill, good Cormac," she said, "I do owe it all to your kind teaching; and if I win the arrow this day, you shall have it as a birthday gift from me, to wear in your bonnet instead of your pipe."

The forester lifted his bonnet with a gratified air, mingled with respect, at this expression of kindness from his lovely young mistress, and said,

"I know you would give Cormac, sweet lady, even the fair white plume that graces your brow if you thought it would gratify the old man. God bless you, noble child; may you live to see many such bright birthdays as this!" The rough huntsman brushed a tear from his eyes as he spoke; for the experience of years had told him that clouds would obscure the bright sky of her young hopes, and that each returning birthday might be but a sad waymark to denote the slow passage of a life of sorrow and trial. "The countess has bid me come and see if you need my aid in fitting your shafts, that you delay."

"No, no, Cormac," said the maiden, blushing; but directly she cried, "Yes, you can help me. I am undecided whether to shoot an arrow that tapers from the head to the feathers, or from the feathers to the head, or from the middle both ways"

"What says Master Robert?" asked Dermot, smiling archly through one of his little gray eyes, the other, from the long habit of shutting it in shooting, having at last got to be so firmly closed up in a radiating network of fine wrinkles as to have been for the last ten years of his life invisible.

"Pshaw, Cormac!" she cried, stooping till her snowy plumes shaded her burning cheek; "I did not ask Lord Robert, but you."

"I have advised Lady Kate, forester, to shoot arrows that taper both to feather and pile," said the youth, haughtily.

"And she chooses—"

"Those that taper from the pile to the feather," said the maiden, quickly

"If the distance were seventy yards instead of fifty," said the forester, measuring the ground with his eye, "it would be a good shaft for a steady hand; but, if you will let me decide, I would recommend you to take the taper from the feather, especially as the air is in motion."

"Your skill is at fault for once, old man," said the young noble, with a flushed brow; "the best bowmen in England—ay, Robin Hood himself, were he here this day—would teach you your craft better."

"You are in error, Master Robert," said the forester, with some warmth, in defence of his profession; "and he who taught you that a double taper is better in a wind than—"

"Hist, old graybeard! you know nothing of woodscraft; yonder fisher's lad will even tell you a shaft swelling in the middle will waver in its passage through the wind like a weathercock."

"Nay, Master Robert—"

"Speak again, old man, and I strike you!" said

the young noble, imperiously, angry that his skill should be called in question; feeling positive that he alone was right, or else too proud to acknowledge his conviction.

"For shame, Lester," cried Kate Bellamont, with an indignant look; "I did not think you were of so overbearing and ungracious a temper! Besides," she added, proudly, "I sought Cormac's opinion! Strike an old man, and in a lady's presence! Out upon thy manhood, Robert. Ask Cormac's forgiveness, or never speak to me more."

"Pardon my hasty speech, Kate," he said, abashed by her look, and reproached by the cutting irony of her words, approaching her as he spoke with an air of deep mortification, "forgive—"

"To Cormac, sir, not me."

"For Cormac, in atonement, I will send from Castle More a fat buck, with this very arrow sticking in its heart; but," he added, with haughty fierceness, "I will ask no man's forgiveness. If I have offended, I am ready to stand by my words."

"Marry come up! we are like to have a letting of blood here," said the maiden, between jest and seriousness. "Will you be docile, Robert?"

"At your bidding, Kate, as a lamb."

"*Very* like a lamb. Forget it, Dermot. You have made his pride a little sore to tell him, before a lady, he knew not how to choose a shaft, and so unfit to be an esquire of archery."

"Young blood will up," said the forester. "I meant not to gainsay your skill, Master Robert, for it's known to every bowman that no young hand in the county can send a shaft farther or surer than young Lord Robert of Castle More."

"That will do, Cormac. Now, Robert, see that you henceforward take fire less readily; and you, good Dermot, refrain from wounding the esteem of

these young lords. Verily, it behooves me to look to my own speech in such fiery company. Nay, Robert," she added, laughing, "I have done. Give me the shafts; and, as we are to have three shots apiece at the target, I will shoot one of each kind, and be the prize his whose arrow wins! Give me them, Robert!—nay, don't press my fingers so hard; I don't want them in my hand, but in the pouch. Go, Cormac, I am ready. I see my lady mother is shaking her silver arrow at me already for loitering here when I should be at the post."

The next moment she had joined the archers, and the trial of skill forthwith commenced. The first arrow that was shot was from the bow of a fair-haired girl, in a blue hat and a silken bodice of the same colour; it flew wide of the mark, and quivered in the trunk of a tree sixty yards off.

"There was nerve in that, Lady Eustace," said old Cormac, who watched each shot with professional interest; "but you grasped the handle of your bow too tightly, and so made your aim unsteady. Hold your bow as lightly as you would a hunting-whip. 'Tis not strength, but skill, that sends the bolt into the eye of the butt."

The young archeress laughed at her failure, and resigned her place to another, who was distinguished by an orange-coloured spencer. This second shot was more successful; for, swiftly cleaving the air, the arrow stuck in the orange circle.

"Bravo! orange to orange!" was the cry that on all sides hailed this appropriate hit.

The third shaft was still better directed; and, hitting the red or inner circle, stuck there for a moment trembling like an aspen-leaf, and then fell to the ground.

"A brave bolt that! a brave bolt that," said the forester, "and drawn well to the head. But you

should have brought the nock of your arrow down more towards your ear. The ear in shooting an arrow; the eye in firing a pistol or harquebuss. That shaft was a taper from the feather, Master Robert."

"Hush, Cormac," cried Kate Bellamont, quickly; "would you get your gray beard into a broil. Robert, bring me my quiver," she said, as she saw the young man's eye light up; "one of my arrows, the very one you gave me, has the cock-feather awry! Stay! you need not bring the quiver, but select a shaft for me yourself. I will keep it as my forlorn hope, and mark me if it do not carry off the prize." She sought his eyes and looked so bewitchingly after a manner maidens have of their own, that his brow coloured and his eyes beamed with a different emotion, while, with a fluttering heart, he went to do her bidding.

Oh, gentle and angelic woman! ever ready to calm the ruffled brow with words of peace! to bring good out of evil! to step between fierce man and his reinless passions! with an eye to sooth, a voice to disarm, a smile to win! Blessings on thee, woman! whether in thy happy and innocent girlhood, or fair and gentle maidenhood; whether maid or matron, young or old, lovely or homely! Blessings on thee, sweet leaven of humanity! yet partaking so much of the heavenly nature, that the sons of the gods, we are told, were lured from their celestial thrones to cast their crowns at thy feet!

A fourth arrow hit the black circle; and the fifth, sent from the bow of a tall, graceful girl, struck on the outer edge of the target and splintered it, while the bow itself snapped in two in her hand.

"What a mischievous shot, Fanny," cried Lady Bellamont, smiling; "if by-and-by you launch Cu-

pid's shafts at your lovers' hearts in that way, you will make sad havoc."

"It was all, your ladyship, of placing the short limb of the bow uppermost. Hugh Conor must be getting old that he teacheth not his pupil better to handle the bow," said old Cormac, shaking his snowy locks as the next archeress, a sylph-like little being, about fifteen, with dangerous hazel eyes; rich chestnut-coloured hair, that flowed in curls all over her shoulders; a voice like some merry bird's, and a wild, joyous spirit lighting up like a sunbeam her whole countenance, took her place at the stand.

"Now, cousin Gracy, do be steady!" cried Kate Bellamont; "take heed! you will shoot my esquire through the heart if you handle your bow so carelessly."

"And then you would shoot me through the head in return, I dare say."

The laughing girl bounded to the stand as she spoke, carelessly drew her arrow to the head, and, ere she had well taken aim, away it flew, and passed through the centre of the emblazoned target waving on the summit of the pavilion, and continued its wild flight into the wood beyond.

"Bravo, cousin Gracy! you have won the silver arrow," cried Kate Bellamont. "Lord Robert, I wonder if that was the arrow you chose for Lady Grace. A taper both ways, or I'll forfeit my jennet!"

"Who makes the broil now, young mistress?" asked the old forester, with a glance of humour.

"You and I, worthy Cormac, are two very different people where a young gentleman is concerned," said the maiden, laughing.

The forester shook his head incredulously, and, turning to Grace Fitzgerald, said, "Faith, but it was

a brave shot that, my young lady! You have done what old Dermot could not have done at a target, playing in the wind like that. But, with the leave of my lady the queen, you must have a second shot at the real target. Take this arrow, that tapers from the feather to the pile; fit it to your bow-string exactly at the spot where it is wound round with silk; and, if you will follow my directions, I will teach you to strike the centre of the true butt, or never draw arrow to head again." Leave being granted by acclamation, the archeress merrily resumed her attitude and prepared to follow his instructions.

"Hold the bow easily in your hand. Throw your head back a little. That will do. Now keep your bow-arm straightened, and bend the wrist of your gloved hand inward. Now raise your bow, steadily drawing the arrow at the same time—not towards your eye, but towards your ear. Be steady! When it is three parts drawn, take your aim at the centre. Keep the head of the arrow a little to the right of the mark. Be cool, and, if you are sure of your aim, draw the arrow quickly and steadily to the head, and gently part your fingers and let it go!"

The shaft, loosened from the string, cut the air and buried itself in the very centre of the golden eye of the target. A shout from every part of the field acknowledged the success of the quick pupil, and bore testimony to the skill of the experienced old archer.

"It is Cormac's shot, not mine," said the archeress; "I am satisfied with piercing the glittering centre of yonder escutcheon."

"The queen shall decide," cried several of the party, turning towards the throne where sat the lovely countess, amid her youthful attendants, participating with girlish interest in the scene, and

prepared to decide all appeals to her royal umpirage.

"Gracy is right. Cormac's skill directed the shaft. She has no honest claim to the honour of the hit, save the credit of having stood quiet longer than she was ever known to before! The banner with its perforated target she is justly entitled to; and," added the countess, with a smile, "I here award it to her."

"And if I ever get a husband he shall carry it before him into battle," said the merry sylph. "Now, divine Kate, see that you don't wound my arrow. I would not have it injured for a silver one."

"It tapers from the middle in each direction, I have no doubt," said Kate, archly, glancing mischievously towards her esquire as she prepared to take her place at the stand.

"Your speech tapers in both directions, wild Kate," retorted the other, blushing. "I wonder what you and Lord Robert could have been doing, that you loitered so long about the pavilion! There, I declare, if you are not holding your bow with the short limb uppermost!"

Kate blushed in her turn, and reversed it.

"Why, cousin Kate Bellamont, you are going to shoot with the feather towards the target!" cried the tantalizing little maiden. "Really, I *do* begin to wonder what you and Lester *could* have been about, that the mention of it scatters your wits and makes you look so *very* foolish!"

Kate shook her head with a playful menace at her tormentor, placed her arrow with the right end to the bow-string, and took her stand by the target. The instant she fixed her eyes on it her self-possession returned, and, elevating her bow, she threw herself with careless grace into the attitude of an accomplished archeress.

A more beautiful object than this young creature, standing in the strikingly spirited attitude she had assumed, can hardly be imagined. Though but sixteen, her form was divinely perfect. Every limb—foot, hand, and arm—was a rare model for the sculptor's chisel. The undulating outline of her shoulders was faultless; and her figure, perhaps, was the more beautiful that her bust and waist, and the wavy symmetry of her whole person, was just receiving that harmony of touch and roundness of finish which marks the era when the wild romping girl is merging into the blushing, conscious, loving, and loveable maiden of seventeen. Descended from an ancient Milesian family, she betrayed her origin in her complexion, which was a rich brunette, reflecting in warm, sunny tints the mantling blood, which came and went at every emotion. Her eyes were dark and sparkling as night with its stars, and as, with a slightly bent brow, she fixed them on the target, they had a cool and steady expression remarkable in one of her years and sex. She wore a dark ruby velvet jacket, laced over a stomacher rich with brilliants, and a velvet hat of the same dark ruby, surmounted by a plume of white ostrich feathers, in that day a rare and costly ornament, which gracefully drooped about her head in striking contrast with her raven locks that floated around her superb neck in the wildest freedom. Her lips, like most of the lips of Erin's fair maidens, were of a rich coral red, and, just parted as she took sight, rendered visible a pearly line of beautifully-arranged teeth. Her mouth, when closed, was finely shaped, and sometimes wore an air of decision, that did not, however, in any way diminish its witchery. The glow of health, and the pride of birth and beauty, were upon her countenance, and every feminine grace and charm seemed to play around her.

As she stood with one foot a little advanced, her neck slightly curved to bring her eyes down to a level with the mark, her left side, but no part of the front of the body, accurately turned towards the target, the eyes of old Cormac Dermot glistened with pride. Slowly she elevated the bow, drawing the arrow simultaneously towards the ear with the first three gloved fingers of her right hand, till she had drawn it out three quarters of its length, when, pausing till she had filled her eye with the golden eye of the target, she drew it smartly to its head and let it loose from her fingers. For an instant she stood following its swift flight: the pupils of her dark eyes dilated and eager; her lips closely shut; her chest advanced; her right arm elevated and curved above her shoulders, the wrist bent, and the fingers of the hand turned gently downward; the left arm extended at full length, and grasping the relaxed bow; her neck curved; her spirited head thrown back, and her whole action animated and commanding; presenting altogether, perhaps, the most graceful attitude the female form is susceptible of assuming.

The arrow was sent with unerring aim, struck the golden eye within half an inch of Grace Fitzgerald's, and buried itself to its feather. The lawn rung with the plaudits of both archeresses and esquires; and even the retainers and fishermen, who were humble but curious spectators of the sports, gave vent to their admiration in shouts of clamorous applause. Old Cormac swung his long yew bow above his head with delight, and looked as if, in the pride of the moment, he would have hugged his accomplished pupil to his heart.

"Do not be so elated, good Dermot," she said, laughing; "it was the arrow I chose—a taper from the pile."

"The more skill in the hand that drove it so truly," said the forester.

"I must do still better than this, else neither you nor Lord Robert, who, methinks, looks somewhat blank to find I have not missed to gratify him, will neither of you get the prize."

"It was not a fair trial, Kate," said the esquire, gayly; "the wind has lulled; and, as you drew your bow, there was not a breath of air."

"If, nevertheless, that had been a taper from the feather," said the forester, after surveying the target earnestly for a moment, as obstinately bent on adhering to his original opinion as even the spirited young noble himself, "it would have cleft the arrow of Lady Gracy through its length to the pile."

"We will see to that anon, worthy Cormac. I have two shots more. Here is the arrow you chose for me, which I will fit to my bow-string, and do my best to drive it through my cousin's."

"I dare say you will if you can, and would like, also, to destroy everything else Lord Robert gives me," said the roguish Grace, putting up her lip and tossing her head, with its cloud of rich hair, in admirably affected pique.

The young esquire of Kate Bellamont looked embarrassed; Kate laughed and drummed on the ground with her foot, while the whole party began forthwith to prepare for the next round. The customary mode of ascertaining the value of the hits in archery, by estimating it in proportion to their distance from the centre, was departed from in the present instance. By the method alluded to, a hit in the gold counts nine; in the red, three; in the orange, two; in the black, one; and their sum is the value of the hits: a process which makes three hits in the red circle of the same value, or nearly so, of one in the gold. In the present case, the

shots were limited to three, and the prize awarded to the greatest number of hits in the gold.

In the second round, the first three arrows struck three different circles; and one well-directed shaft, shot by the archeress who had before broken her bow, hit the gold, though at its junction with the red. Grace Fitzgerald bent her bow without aim, but the courteous arrow went accurately to the mark, and struck within a finger's breadth of the centre, much to the delight of Cormac, the forester, who took himself all the credit of the fair shot. Kate, with the arrow given her by Cormac fitted to her bow-string, took somewhat less careful aim than with her first shot, and was about to loose the arrow, when a hawk, bearing a live fish in his talons, soared above the cliff, and with swift wing flew high across the lawn in the direction of the forest. Quicker than thought, the point of the arrow was elevated from the target into the air, drawn to its head with a stronger arm and more resolute eye, and launched from the bow-string. With irresistible force and unerring aim, it cleft the air and struck the proud bird of prey beneath the wing. He uttered a wild cry, flew heavily a few feet perpendicularly upward, and then, whirling round and round in concentric circles, each gyration bringing him nearer the earth, fell, transfixed with the arrow, among the fishermen: fluttering wildly on the ground in agony, he succeeded, before they could secure him, in flapping himself over the precipice. He was instantly followed by a daring young fisherman, who had been endeavouring to capture him—the same youth whose admiration of her had before attracted the notice of Kate Bellamont.

For a moment the generous heart of the fair archer shrunk from the wreck she had made, and

she turned away her head from the dying struggles of the dark bandit of the air. But maidens of that period were too familiar with the more revolting scenes of the chase to show emotion at witnessing the death of a hawk; and, therefore, sympathy for the fate of the victim of her skill gave place to the pride of the successful archer.

"There is a prize for you, Cormac, better than a golden arrow," she said, with a flashing eye; "and, when next I go a hawking," she archly added, "I will be sure to use arrows that taper from the feather."

The third and final round now followed. Each archeress had shot her last arrow save Kate Bellamont, yet but three arrows besides her own and the equivocal shot of Grace Fitzgerald were in the centre, and these from as many different bows. Grace had made a wilder shot even than her first; for her arrow, jeopardizing the lives of the poor fishermen, flew far over the cliff out of sight. Four of the companions of Kate had, equally with herself, each an arrow in the gold; but as she had yet to shoot her third arrow, she had yet a chance of making a second hit and winning the prize. Glancing with proud consciousness of her own skill towards her young esquire, she drew her remaining arrow through her fingers, carefully examining each one of its three feathers, and fitted it accurately to the bow-string; then elevating her bow, she steadily drew the arrow. All was breathless expectation. The old archer looked on as if he would not grieve if for once his pupil should miss; while her young esquire watched her with the anxiety of one who felt that his judgment and skill in the noble science of archery were at stake. As she was ready to loose the arrow, the wind, which had hitherto gently fanned her cheek, increased suddenly to a strong breeze, lifting the hair from

her brow and tossing her tresses in wild confusion about her neck. The eyes of Cormac lighted up with triumph, while Lord Robert himself curled his lip scornfully and smiled with confidence. The archeress, who had dropped the point of the arrow with a misgiving, remembering what Cormac had said of it as ill adapted to a wind, on catching the confident eye of her esquire again raised the bow, and coolly and steadily drew the shaft to its head. Every eye followed it in its swift course, and saw it strike the arrow of Grace Fitzgerald on the end, shiver it to its pile, and drive itself through the target to the feather. A general exclamation of surprise and admiration bore testimony to the skill of the victor; the dark eyes of the young esquire sparkled with triumph, while the discomfited Dermot said, with a broad laugh of good-humour,

"Well, Master Robert, it's your time to boast now. By the boar's head o' Castle Cor! I shall never hear the end of your double taper. Faith, masters, no hand but my young Lady Kate's could have sent a double taper with such an aim and in this wind, which young Lord Robert there has got old Elpsy to set a blowing to triumph over the old man's skill. Well a-day! What the gray-headed forester said of it is true, nevertheless; but when such a hand and eye as Lady Kate's sends the bolt to the butt, there is no depending on old rules; especially," he added, laughing, "with a witch's wind to carry the arrow to its centre."

The young noble frowned darkly on the speaker, and joined not in the laugh of his companions. Lady Bellamont now commanded Cormac to sound his horn three times, and bid, in the name of the queen of archery, the band of archeresses, with their esquires, who were hastening towards the target to

collect their arrows, to approach the throne, and witness the award of the prize to the victor.

Amid the congratulations and applauses of the whole field, for, unenvious, each light-hearted girl seemed to share the triumph of the accomplished archeress, the victoress advanced to the rustic foot-stool of the throne, and gracefully knelt to receive, from the hand of the beautiful queen of the sports, the glittering prize—a finely-wrought arrow of silver, five inches in lengh, with a chased gold head, on which was graven, in small Gothic characters, these words:

"Field of Archery, Castle Cor, May,
MDCXCIV."

"Victorious archeress," said the queen, rising, her face beaming with maternal love and pride, and extending her arm containing the prize, "receive this fair token of your matchless skill, so well displayed this day. May you in every other female accomplishment, my sweet Kate, be as successful as in archery."

"She'll be a match for poor little Cupid, with his tiny bow and arrow, I dare say," said Grace Fitzgerald, with a roguish eye. "Poor youth!" she continued, glancing significantly towards the handsome Lord Robert, who stood at the right hand of the victress, "I pity him if he's like to have such a hole made in his heart as Kate has made in yonder target."

This sally of the sprightly maiden was merrily received by all the youthful circle save the conscious two who were its subjects. The lovely countess now left the throne, embraced and kissed her noble Kate, whom her companions, gathering around her, playfully forced into the vacant seat. She was about to bound from it again, when she

checked the impulse, reseated herself, and bade her esquire advance and kneel before her. The gallant youth obeyed; when, bending gracefully forward, she fastened the silver arrow in the loop of his bonnet, and bade him wear it on every return of that day in memory of the field of archery at Castle Cor.

The noble youth accepted the gift, won by the arrow he had chosen, with the same playful, half-serious spirit in which it was bestowed, and then kissed the fair hand that presented it with at least full as much passion as gallantry. Amid the merry sallies, especially from Grace Fitzgerald, this scene created, the whole party of archers bounded away like a troop of wild deer towards the target, to ascertain more accurately the nature of the several hits, while the countess, at a more dignified pace, attended by the forester, returned to the castle to prepare for the further entertainments of the day. But the fleetest of foot among the youthful bevy of fair girls had not measured half the green space between the linden-tree and bristling target, when a thrilling outcry of terror from a fisherman on the cliff, who wildly waved his arms to some one below, and the next moment clasped his hands together in despair, checked them in mid career; and, with hearts palpitating with vague apprehensions of danger, they flew to the precipice to ascertain the cause of this sudden alarm.

CHAPTER II.

"From crag to crag descending—swiftly sped
Stern Conrad down, nor once he turned his head;
He bounds, he flies, until his footsteps reach
The verge where ends the cliff, begins the beach."
The Corsair.

"Dark was the flow of Oscar's hair,
But Allan's locks were bright and fair."
Oscar of Alva.

"But who is he, whose darken'd brow
Glooms in the midst of general mirth?"
Ibid.

When the hawk, which had been so skilfully struck by the arrow of Kate Bellamont, flapped himself, in his violent death-throes, over the edge of the cliff, a gallant young fisher's lad, seeing him lodge in the topmost branches of a blasted tree twenty feet below, fearlessly flung himself off the precipice, and lighted, by the aid of a limb, on a projecting rock within twelve feet of him. The cliff at this place was one hundred and forty feet in height, and, except where its surface was opened by narrow crevices, in which a few shrubs and dwarf cedars found precarious roothold, or where a fragment, hurled from its seat by the lightning, or fallen through age into the sea, left a narrow shelf, it presented to the passing boatman on the bay below a naked and gigantic wall, of nearly perpendicular ascent and inaccessible to human foot: indeed, from a midway brow seventy feet from the base, it receded, leaving a sheer descent of that space from the water, which lay black, still, and of profound depth beneath. Near the top of the cliff grew a scathed cedar, clinging with its hardy roots into a cleft in its face, and leaning

threateningly over the flood. Its top reached within twenty feet of the summit of the precipice; but, inclining at an angle away from it, stood full seven feet out from its side. It was the ragged arms of this tree which caught the hawk in his descent, and where, with fierce cries of rage and pain, he struggled to free himself from the fatal shaft, but which he drove deeper and deeper into his side with every beat of his strong wing.

The young man paused after lighting upon the first landing-place, and measured with a cool glance the dizzy descent; and then fixed his gaze on the bird, whose blood-red eyes flashed forth vindictive fire as they met his, with a resolute look that conveyed a determination to capture him at whatever risk. The pliant limb of a tree growing on the summit, by which he had let himself down to the place where he stood, had, on being released, sprung back to its natural position far beyond his reach: the surface of rock, eight feet in height above him, was as even as a wall of masonry; and an upward glance satisfied him that, without assistance from those above, to reascend again would be impossible. Quietly smiling at the difficulty in which he had involved himself, the fearless lad placed his eyes again on the hawk with the confident and resolute, and almost stern, expression they had before borne, and began to examine narrowly his position, and to look about for some safe way of descending to a perilous spur, the breadth of a man's two hands, which, on peering down, he discovered projecting from the side of the rock on a level with the top of the tree. Whether governed solely by that pride of spirit which is found in most youths of high-toned feelings, he internally resolved to accomplish what he had thoughtlessly undertaken; whether actuated by the spirit of adventure, or whether

fascinated by the beauty of Kate Bellamont, he wished to preserve the proud bird as a trophy of her skill; whether one or all of these motives influenced the daring fisher's lad, remains to be unfolded.

The spot on which he stood was the projecting edge of the second stratum of rock, twenty inches wide, running irregularly along the face of the precipice, and appeared to have been formed by the falling away of large chips or flakes from the upper and softer stratum. From this rim there ran a zigzag crevice, an inch wide, obliquely downward along the rock to the shelf below, on which grew a handful of long grass and two or three slender shrubs. On a level with it was the top of the tree; underneath, thirty feet below, were visible its gnarled roots clinging to a mere lip of the rock, yet vigorously inserting themselves in the neighbouring crevices; farther down, on the edge of the brow where the cliff began to incline inward, was visible yet one more foothold, scarcely a palm in breadth; below that, the shrinking eye measured a dizzy vacancy till it fell upon the still, pool-like bay beneath.

The youth surveyed these features of the dangerous precipice with a steady eye; and having coolly calculated his chance of accomplishing safely the descent of the twelve feet below him, sat down with his legs hanging over, and deliberately drew off his stout fisher's boots and hung them on a twig beside him. Then turning round, he carefully slid off and suspended his body an instant by his right hand, till he had firmly inserted the tip of one foot and the fingers of the other hand in the zigzag crevice. Releasing his right hand from its grasp on the shelf, he then carried it below the left, and having got a firm hold of the edge of the fissure,

let go with the left and passed it in its turn under the right: he changed the position of his feet in the same manner so long as he could obtain, which was not always the case, a resting-place for his toes; and in this way, with cool self-possession and undaunted nerve, which even the wild cries and beating wings of the bird could not move, he succeeded in safely reaching the small projecting leaf, and stood on a level with the top of the tree. The falcon was now within seven feet of him horizontally; but he seemed as far from the attainment of his object as before. It was impossible to spring into the tree, even if its roots should not be torn from their rocky bed by the force of the leap and his weight. But the young fisherman possessed a temper that never yielded to obstacles, and seemed to be governed by a spirit that scorned defeat. Stretching himself out upon the shelf, which was just broad enough to contain his body lying sideways to the face of the rock, he looked down, and saw within reach of his arm a stout root, the strength of which he tested; and below this, within reach of his feet if he should swing himself off, was a sharp projection scarce the size of his foot; and a few inches below that, a stout limb of the tree rested against the precipice. His eye embraced at once these advantages, and he did not hesitate to avail himself of them.

Lightly, but yet with care, he committed his weight to the root, and, hanging at the full length of his arm, reached, after three unsuccessful trials, the spur below with the tip end of one of his toes. This, to one like him, was a sufficient hold to authorize him to release his grasp above. Lying, like a fly upon a wall, close against the side of the rock, he now fearlessly yet cautiously let go his hold, and stood with one foot on the projection, with no other

support but his muscular adhesion to the wide wall of the precipice. This was a situation attended with the most imminent peril; and by the firmly-closed lips and the almost stern expression of his eyes, it was clear that he was fully conscious of his dangerous position. But there was no shrinking, no pallor, no sign of fear! He was equal to the danger he had braved; and, as this increased, the powers of his mind and body seemed to expand to compass it.

The branch of the tree was within a few inches of the point on which his foot rested. Slowly and cautiously he dropped his unsupported leg, while he pressed his cheek and shoulder close against the side of the cliff; for he knew that the slightest deviation from the equilibrium would be fatal. His foot at length touched the horizontal limb, which was the thickness of a man's arm where it met the rock. He repeatedly pressed upon it, each successive time harder and heavier, until he found that it would bear his whole weight. Then directing his hand carefully downward towards his feet, he placed it on the point of rock, removing his foot at the same instant to make room for it, and stood upright and with confidence on the limb.

Satisfied that the branch, which, turned back by the cliff, had forced the tree to lean over the water, would safely sustain him, he now glanced down to the foot of the tree, and began to inspect the hold of the trunk upon the shelf from which it grew. The examination afforded him no very great assurance; nevertheless, he determined to test its strength by advancing out on the limb, though aware that, if it should yield to his weight, he would be hurled with it into the sea. Even this reflection did not present any weighty objection to his making the trial; for with a fearless reck-

lessness, for which there is no sufficient term in language, he half anticipated the possibility of such a catastrophe, and caught himself calculating the chances in favour of his taking in safety a flight into the deep pool beneath. Letting go his grasp on the point of rock, he now settled himself astride the branch, and made gradual approaches towards the trunk. It remained firm as the rock in which it was imbedded, and scarcely gave signs of feeling his weight till he touched the body, when the top slightly vibrated. He paused; but, finding it still remain fast, rose to his feet and clasped the scathed trunk, at first lightly, and then more firmly; and at last, gaining confidence, he shook it till the hawk fluttered anew in its perch. Assured of its security, his lips unclosed, and his eyes lost their severity, and with a smile of success he cast them triumphantly upward, where, but a few feet above him, entangled by the long shaft of the arrow and his broken wing, he saw the falcon secured in the crotch formed by a fork of three stumps of limbs (all that decay had left) that terminated its summit.

Without hesitation he began to climb the trunk, which, save the limb by which he had reached it, and the branches crowning it, was bare from its roots upward. This was the least difficult part of his hazardous enterprise, and he soon got within reach of the bird, and stretched one arm forth to seize him by the wing. But the fierce animal, who had for a few moments ceased his struggles to watch, with a quick and guarded glance, the movements of the young fisherman, no sooner saw this hostile demonstration on the part of his human foe, than, with an intelligence supernaturally called forth by existing suffering and anticipated danger, he struck at him fiercely with his sharp, glittering talons; while, stretching downward his head to the

full extent of his neck, he uttered long, wild cries of mingled fear and menace. Nothing daunted by what, in itself, was sufficiently appalling, the young man coolly watched his opportunity, and, at the expense of several severe wounds in the wrist from his talons, caught the hawk by the throat. Clinging round a limb with the disengaged arm, he raised himself higher in the tree, and lifting his prize, which still struck at him with his armed feet, he skilfully extricated the wing and arrow from the crotch: the next instant, with the huge, fluttering bird in his hand, he had slidden down the trunk, and was standing on the transverse limb with a flushed brow, and a triumphant look illuminating his handsome and fearless countenance.

With one arm bent around the tree, and the other holding the hawk at full length, he now began to cast his eyes upward. They travelled over the bare surface, scarcely without lighting upon a resting-place for a squirrel; and he began, for the first time, to question the possibility of reascending; it having been comparatively easy for him to let his body down by the crevice, as he had descended, while it would be impracticable for him to lift its whole weight up again by the mere effort of the fingers. A glance demonstrated this to him at once. But time was not given him to reflect on a plan for surmounting a difficulty which, in reality, was insurmountable, his faculties being at once called into action to save himself from being thrown from this dizzy perch by the struggles of the hawk. This ferocious creature had been wounded by the arrow in the side just beneath the wing, which was broken by the fall to the earth, and, thence passing upward, the barb had come out through his back, without touching any vital part. His strength was, therefore, through pain, rather augmented than diminished;

and notwithstanding the manual pressure upon his windpipe, he now began to battle fiercely with his captor, fighting both with his claws and remaining wing. Though holding him out at arm's length, the young man was unable wholly to defend himself from the strong blows of the wing, which was three feet in length, with which he violently assailed him about the head, while with his talons he succeeded in striking his person and inflicting a deep wound in his breast. He for a time coolly bore the heavy sweeps of the wing, hoping he would soon tire; but he forgot that his terrible antagonist was "the bird of tireless wing;" and, at length, finding his own strength beginning to fail, though his spirit was unsubdued, he loosened his hold from the trunk of the tree which his arm had hitherto encircled, and, leaning his back against it, watched his opportunity, and suddenly, with a firm grasp, seized the wing as it was beating against his temples, and, by a sudden and skilful turn of his wrist, dislocated it. This bold act nearly destroyed his equilibrium; and, after its successful accomplishment, he just had time to recover his hold on the tree to save himself from falling into the dark wave below. For a moment afterward his heart throbbed tumultuously; and reflecting on the imminent peril he had incurred by this necessary exposure, he trembled with emotion and several times breathed heavily, as if to relieve his breast of a weight of suffocating sensations—the tribute which nature demanded of humanity.

Goaded to increased rage by the additional pain, and maddened at his vain efforts to lift his useless wing, the eyes of the hawk glittered in his head like a snake's, and, opening his red jaws, he thrust forth his long, narrow tongue, and hissed at his captor like an angry serpent. It was a moment that

called for all the moral energy and physical nerve man is capable of exercising in the hour of danger. The extraordinary young fisherman evinced the possession of these qualities in a degree adequate to the crisis which called them into action. With his eyes fixed unflinchingly on the burning eyeballs of the hawk, and calmly indifferent the while to the terrible hisses which came hot from his throat and fell warm upon his face, he continued to keep him at bay so that his talons should not reach his person, and put forth all his strength to strangle him. There was a moral grandeur in the spectacle this young fisher's lad presented, fearlessly perched on his fearful eminence, as regardless of the depth below as if standing in his own cottage door, battling at such odds with the fiercest warrior of the air!

It was at this crisis that one of the fishermen, a very old man, whose attention, with that of his companions, had been hitherto too much occupied by the trial at archery to give a thought to the youth, after having remained to see the prize awarded to the victress, turned to leave the ground, when missing the young man, he recollected that he had seen him follow the hawk to the verge of the cliff. Calling him by name and not receiving any reply, he approached the precipice; but finding that he was on the most perpendicular part of it, he cast only a hasty glance down, and was about to turn away, supposing he had, unseen, descended to the beach by the usual route a little farther to the north, when a movement far below arrested his eyes. Looking steadily, he beheld the youth with one arm clasped round the tree, and the other stretched out, holding the bird by the neck, while all his moral and physical energies were called into action to enable him to defend himself against the talons of the savage creature.

A glance conveyed to the fisherman the whole extent of the danger; and, after looking down upon him for a moment in speechless horror, his limbs trembled with fear, and, giving utterance to a wild cry, he would have fallen from the precipice had he not caught by a tree that hung over its verge. Kate Bellamont was the first to reach the cliff on hearing the alarm given by the old man; and, glancing down, she intuitively comprehended the peril in which the youth had placed himself. With wonderful presence of mind, waving her hand back to those advancing, she said with energy,

"Hold! all of ye! Breathe not a word! He is in mortal danger! A shriek, or a sign of fear among us may unnerve his bold spirit and be fatal to him!"

Several of the young archeresses stopped suddenly, and turned pale at this intimation of danger; while one or two, with more sensibility of nerves, unable to control their fears, turned and fled towards the castle, as if in the retirement of their closets they would shut out all sense of the threatened evil. Young Lord Robert was the first by Kate Bellamont's side.

"By Heaven! a bold peasant!" he said, his eyes sparkling with admiration; "but—"

"Lester, this is no time for words," spoke the maiden, quickly. "Something must be done for him. How could he have got there in safety! Poor, rash youth!"

"Alas! my child, my lost, lost child!" cried the old fisherman, who was seated on the ground shaking his head mournfully, turning his eyes away from the trying scene. "God protect thee, lad, for no human aid will avail thee!"

"Do not despair, good Dennis, he may yet be saved," said Kate, encouragingly.

"Let go the bird!" shouted Lester.

The fisher's lad, whose attention had been called to the top of the cliff by the shout of the old man, and who had watched the movements of those above, smiled proudly at this request, and firmly shook his head in the negative.

"He deserves to perish if he will peril his life for that bird," said the young noble.

"Hush, Lester, he must be aided. Mark, drop the bird, or he will throw you off. How could you be so foolish as to adventure your life for that fierce hawk!"

"There is humble gallantry at the bottom of it, I dare swear," said Lester, with a tone in which there was a slight shade of scorn.

"Perhaps there may be!" was the quiet reply of the maiden. "Mark, let the bird go, I command you. If your life is sacrificed, I shall feel that I am the cause of it."

"By the bow of Dan Cupid! I would change places with the serf to have my situation create such an interest in your breast, fair lady." This was spoken, partly with sincere feeling, partly with derision, by the haughty Lester.

The full, dark gaze of Kate Bellamont encountered his; and with a manner that eloquently conveyed the feeling of contempt that sprang up in her heart, she said,

"Robert Lester must have fallen low in his own self-esteem to be jealous of a fisher's lad!"

The young noble, with all his native haughtiness and pride of spirit, possessed a generous nature, and was ever ready to atone for the wounds which his wayward temper might have caused him unawares to inflict. Especially was this the case where Kate Bellamont was the party interested. With an instantaneous change peculiar to hasty spirits,

he sought pardon of the offended maiden with his eyes, and at once appeared so different, that she saw that she could fully rely on him; plainly reading in his face, with unerring feminine tact, that he nobly had resolved to banish every feeling but the humane one the occasion demanded.

"Lester, he will not release the bird for which he has perilled so much," she said, with frank confidence in her tones, "and we must devise some means to save both him and his prize. Haste to the castle, and get a rope to save your comrade!" she cried to the remaining fisherman.

"I will save him with my life!" said the young noble. "How many bows have we here?"

"A dozen," said Kate, at once comprehending the object of his inquiry. "But are they strong enough, Robert?"

"To bear the weight of three men. Aid me, Kate, in making a chain of them."

In a few seconds they had prepared a rope or chain nearly threescore feet in length, of bows strung together, each link being five feet long. Firmly securing one end to the top of the precipice by carrying it over an upright limb, they successfully tested the strength of the whole by extending it along the lawn, half a dozen drawing on it at once without breaking it.

"This will do," he said with confidence, approaching the cliff to let it down; but, to his surprise, he saw that the youth no longer retained the bird, which, notwithstanding the command of the maiden, he had hitherto seemed resolved, as Lester had hinted, to preserve, at the peril of his life.

While these preparations had been making on the cliff, the hawk, not being any longer able to reach the young fisher's body with his talons, began

to strike and lacerate his wrists. Finding at length that his strength was unequal to the effort of strangulation (his intention having been, if he could have killed him, to have lashed him to his back, and so ascended with him), and satisfied that, while holding him in his hand alive, he could not reascend, he reluctantly had been compelled by a severe wound in the hand to let him go. In his fall the bird struck heavily against the root of the tree, and, bounding off, descended twenty feet lower, when the point of the arrow, which passed through him like a spit, caught in a cleft and firmly held him on the little shelf before described, which projected from the brow that beetled over the sea at the height of seventy feet from it. The youth watched him a few moments steadily, and saw that he moved neither wing nor talon. He was dead!

When the intrepid lad saw him arrested in this manner, and that life was now extinct, the cloud of regret that began to darken his face was all at once chased away by a sunbeam of pleasure; for he discovered, as he followed the bird's course with his eye, that the cleft in which he was caught commenced at the very foot of the tree, and offered him the same perilous facilities of descent that the zigzag one above had afforded. When Lester looked over the cliff preparatory to letting down the chain of bows, he beheld him, therefore, to his astonishment, in the act of swinging himself from the horizontal limb, and the next moment clinging about the trunk below it. Before either Kate or he could speak to warn him, so sudden was their surprise, the daring youth had effected a cautious and rapid descent of the tree, and was standing safely at its roots: on casting their eyes farther below, they discerned, hanging over the very verge of the brow, midway the precipice, the lifeless ger-falcon, which

instantly accounted to them for this new and unexpected movement.

"His blood be upon his own head!" cried the maiden, shrinking from the sight. "Lester, look! Is he not attempting to reach the bird? Or perhaps he finds that he cannot climb the precipice again, and is trying to descend to the water!"

"It is a long step of seventy feet from where that bird hangs to the bottom," said the old fisherman, for an instant rousing himself. "He will die, lady, and I shall have to convey his mangled corpse in my skiff to my lonely hut, and dig for the poor boy a grave in the sand. I loved him as if he had been my own flesh and blood!"

Kate was about to ask him, with surprise, if he were not his own son, when a cry of alarm caused her to turn round just in time to see Lord Robert commit himself fearlessly to the chain of bows and swing himself over the dizzy verge. As he descended from her sight, with a smile on his lip and a devotion of the eyes as he met hers, that told her, plainer than words could convey it, that he ventured his life for her sake prompted by his sympathy with the interest she took in the daring fisher's boy, he said resolutely,

"I will save him in spite of himself, or share his fate!"

She was about to speak, but her voice failed her; and covering her eyes to hide him, as he hung suspended above the sea, from her swimming sight, for a few seconds she appeared as if her presence of mind had deserted her. This weakness, if an emotion so natural can be termed such, was but momentary. Recovering herself by a strong mental effort, she once more looked over the cliff, and calmly watched the descent of the daring Lester, whom she knew to be a skilful cragsman, with a

prayer on her lip for his safety. The novel chain by which he descended reached to within ten feet of the spot where the young fisherman stood, and the intention of Lord Robert was to take the tree, and reach the roots of it as the other had done before him. He had accomplished, however, but a few feet of his passage down the rock, not without great peril, though at each junction of the bows he found a resting-place for his feet and a hold for his hands, when the young fisher's lad lowered himself from his shelf, and, getting his fingers in the cleft, began to descend, alternately supporting his weight by his arms, with a celerity and apparent recklessness that, to the spectators above, was fearful to witness: he, however, took a firm grasp of the rock each time, and with a cool head and steady eye, gained the spur where the hawk was fixed. In the mean while Lord Robert had reached the tree; and leaving the chain swinging in the air, he clasped the trunk, and quickly descended it: but the object for which he had so generously ventured his life was now twenty feet below him. With all his nerve, the fearless young noble shuddered when he looked down and beheld the means by which the fisher's lad had made his last descent. Both had reached the points at which they aimed at the same instant; and when Lord Robert bent over to look down, holding firmly by the roots of the tree, the other was standing with perfect self-possession on his dizzy foothold, holding the hawk in one hand, and waving with the other to those above.

"Do you value your life so lightly, peasant, without saying anything of the painful sympathy your folly produces in those who are spectators of your foolhardiness, that you peril it after this fashion?" said the young noble, passionately, yet unable to refuse the admiration due to his fearless character.

"I am not your serf, Lord Robert of Castle More, that my life should be of value in your eyes," said the youth, with a look and bearing as haughty as the young noble's.

"Ha!" exclaimed Lord Robert, with astonishment and anger; "these are brave words to come from beneath a homespun jerkin. By the cross of St. Peter! fisherman, thou dost presume too much upon that equality to which mutual danger has for the moment brought us. I have periled my life to assist thee—not by mine own will, by Heaven! for thou deservest to be rewarded for thy temerity by a bath in the sea; but at the bidding of a lady, who, perforce, thinks, if thou shouldst, by any lucky chance, break thy neck for the hawk her arrow has sent over the cliff, thy blood will be on her head. So I have explained to thee the heighth and depth of my charity, lest thou shouldst swell still bigger to think that, peasant as thou art, thou hast made a noble thy servant."

"A very proper speech, I have no doubt, Lord Robert More," answered the fisherman, with a quiet smile of superiority (as the noble construed it). "I need none of your lordship's aid. Without it I came down, and without it I can go up again."

"The devil have thee, then, for thy obstinacy," cried Lester, his eyes flashing with anger; "by the rood, if I had thee there, I would be of a mind to help thee down rather than up."

"The path by which I came is equally open to your lordship," was the cool answer. "Robert More, thrice have I saved your life; and though you have thanked me like a noble for the deed at the time, have after cancelled it by treating me like a slave, because the accident of birth has made you noble and me base. Leave me again. I will

not owe my life to your lordship!" This was said in a steady and determined, but very quiet tone.

"My good Meredith, I will forgive thy rudeness of speech, for thou hast had offence," said the young man, struck with his proud and independent character, so nearly akin to his own. "The haughtiness with which I have treated thee is one of the consequences of this accident of birth. Believe me, I have never forgotten what I owe to thy courage: once saved from drowning by thee! once snatched from a peril almost equal to that thou art now in! once preserved from death beneath the antlers of an enraged stag! I have not forgotten these debts, thou seest. If I have seemed to thee ungrateful, set it down, brave Mark, to pride of birth rather than want of feeling. Shall I aid thee, lad, in gaining the top?"

"Lord Robert, your words have atoned for the past," said the young fisherman, not unmoved by this generous and manly defence of the proud young noble; "nevertheless, I will not owe my life to you!"

The noble fastened his penetrating gaze on the upturned face of the young fisherman, and thought he discovered a meaning there that was a key to his refusal.

"Ha! I have it!" he said, internally, after a few moments' reflection. "*He dares to place his thoughts on her!*"

Instantly, with that lightning-like rapidity with which his impulsive feelings changed, he shouted in a loud, haughty tone of voice,

"Ho, Sir Peasant! prithee tell me what strange fondness for dead hawks set thee to jeoparding thy life after this sort?"

"Lester," cried Kate Bellamont from the summit of the cliff, hearing their voices without under-

standing the words, "why this delay? Can there be no means of reaching the noble youth?"

"Noble youth!" repeated the young man, scornfully, to himself; "it will be a *princely* next. By the cross! If he does not smile and wave his daring hand to her! And she answers it back! Fellow!" he added, fiercely, "I will come down and hurl thee into the sea!"

"You are welcome, Lord Robert," replied the other, unmoved; "yet, as there is barely room for me, it is certain that, if you do descend, *one* of us only can remain upon it."

The impetuous Lester was already preparing to descend by the crevice; but the coolness of the other at once disarmed his anger.

"Thou art a brave fellow, Mark, and I would not injure thee. But," he added, sternly, "see that thou cross not my path!"

"How mean you, Lord Robert?" he inquired, concealing his penetration of the lover's motives under a look of simplicity that embarrassed the haughty and sensitive noble.

Before he could reply, the voice of the Countess of Bellamont, encouraging them both, was heard from the summit. She only had this instant arrived, drawn hither by the rumour of the danger of the fisher's lad, accompanied by Dermot, and one or two men-servants, with ropes and other means of assisting those below.

Her first proceeding, on discovering the position of the parties, was to attach the rope to the chain of bows, and have the end of it firmly tied to the tree. She then bade the men to lower it steadily till it could be reached by Lord Robert, and in a few seconds he held it in his grasp.

"Now, Sir Peasant," said Lester, relaxing into

his former haughty mood, "here is the means of reascending the cliff."

"You may profit by it, my lord, I will not," said the youth, firmly. "I will receive no favour at your hands."

"Then, by Heaven, thou shalt ascend, whether thou wilt or no," said the noble, with energy. "I have pledged my word to save thee, and I will redeem my pledge. Ho! there above! Drop a piece of cord a few yards in length, so that it will fall at my feet."

The coil was placed by Kate Bellamont on the rope, and the next moment, sliding down like a ring along the chain of bows, it was caught in his hand.

"Let out twenty feet more of the rope," he again shouted, "and see that it is well fast above."

As it passed through his hands, he conducted it over the shelf on which he stood till it touched the feet of the young fisherman. He had quietly watched these preparations, and, as they were completed, he coolly glanced into the depth beneath, and then upward to the young noble, with an air so resolute that the other paused ere he descended by the chain, on a link of which one foot already rested.

"Surely thou wilt not be so mad!" exclaimed Lester, reading a fatal determination in his lofty and intrepid look.

"Robert More, I will owe you no favour. Rather than be beholden to you for my life, I will fling it away, as freely as I have now hazarded it to win a smile from the fair maiden of Castle Cor."

"Thou! By Heaven, I thought it!" he shouted, with scorn and indignation. "If I had thee on a piece of ground two feet square that would hold us both, I would waive my birth, and do battle with thee on that score, hind as thou art! and see if I

could not beat out of thy bones this leaven of insolence! I will now assuredly aid thy return to the summit, that I may have the pleasure afterward of doing for thee this good service."

As Lester spoke, he committed himself with cool intrepidity to the chain, holding in one hand the coil of line, by which it was evidently his intention to lash the young fisherman to the rope, and began rapidly to descend.

"Robert More, I do not fear to meet you on any ground. If I did, I should hardly take *this leap* to avoid the lesson you have in contemplation for me! But I will owe you no favour, not even that of life. Nor shall you lay a finger upon me to force me to do your pleasure in this thing. Hold! place your foot on the nock of this second bow above me, and I will take a free spring out into the air."

This was said in a tone and manner—a steady uplighting of his clear dark eyes, and a firm, muscular compression of the lip—that made the other hesitate; but it was only for an instant: the next moment he let the bow to which he held slip through his hands, and he descended with velocity till his foot struck upon the last link, which was on a level with the young fisherman's head. At the same moment the latter elevated his arms high above his head, holding the hawk between his hands, and placing his feet close together, made a spring into the air!

Lester, with a full knowledge of his cool and resolute character, had not anticipated this result; and, in his surprise, had nearly let go his hold. He at the same time uttered a cry of horror, which was answered from the summit by a loud wail of anguish from many voices; for this act had been witnessed by all, without the cause which influenced it being apparent. Preserving the erect at-

titude with which he had left the rock, the young fisherman descended like lightning, cut the still bosom of the black wave beneath, and disappeared below the agitated surface; the heavy, splashing sound of his fall striking on the ears of those on the summit of the cliff like his death-knell. Wild and full of mortal anguish was the shriek that echoed it!

A flush of hope lighted up the countenance of Lester when he saw the accuracy with which he had struck the surface, and thought upon the manner of his descent. At the same time Kate Bellamont, who had been an interested but puzzled spectator (for their voices, at the height she stood, had not distinctly reached her) of the previous conduct of the parties, and had beheld with horror the seemingly fatal act of the adventurous youth, also marked the natatory art with which he had taken the spring; and, scarcely hoping, watched, equally with Lester, the circling waves, as they widened from the centre, with an intensity amounting to agony.

After an interval of full thirty seconds, which seemed an age to those who watched, the water, which had once more become nearly smooth, was seen to part many yards from the point of descent, and the head of the daring youth appeared above the surface. A shout, loud and long, greeted him from the cliff; and no voice was louder or more glad in the joyful welcome than Lord Robert's. With the hawk elevated in one hand, and buffeting the waves with the other, he swam bravely towards a belt of sand a few yards farther northward; and in a few moments afterward he safely landed, full in sight of those standing anxiously on the cliff. Pointing to his prize, and waving his hand to Kate Bellamont with native gallantry, he disappeared around

an angle of the shore, to reascend, by a beaten and easy path, to the summit of the promontory.

In the mean time Lord Robert became an object of renewed interest to the party. He was sixty feet from the top of the cliff, with no other means of reaching it than the precarious chain of bows and a few additional feet of rope: even the permanent safety of this was doubtful. It depended solely for its strength on the goodness of the yews and the entire soundness of the slender bow-strings; and one of these he discovered, on running his eyes upward, was chafed by some sharp point of the rock with which it had come in contact. There remained, however, no alternative. It was plain that he must either trust himself to it, or follow the example of the young fisherman, and take the leap into the sea. For a moment he gazed down into the water, and seemed to measure with deliberate purpose the empty void between; but, shaking his head with doubt, he once more turned his attention to the equally dangerous, but more probable, means of escape. The catgut which had stranded belonged to the third bow above him. Drawing hard upon it with his whole weight, he saw that it was slowly untwisting, and that it would be madness to trust himself to it. His self-possession, however, did not desert him.

"Can you obtain no stout rope that will reach me here, 'wild Kate?'" he said, in a careless tone; "I fear the ragged points of the rock will cut your bow-strings, and spoil them for further shooting."

"No, Lester, there is none!" answered the maiden, in a deep voice, that betrayed the depth and intensity of her feelings at this crisis; "men have been sent to the cove for ropes, but it is far, and it will be long before they return, even if they succeed in getting them. God protect you! Pre-

serve your coolness, for my sake, Robert!" she added, with that force and truth that spurned, at such a moment, all disguise.

Her words seemed to have awakened anew the spirit within him. Placing his hand on his heart, he carried it to his lips, and gallantly waved it towards her. She answered it encouragingly in return; but instantly turning away overcome by her feelings, cast herself on the bosom of her mother, and burst into tears.

Necessarily ignorant of this touching testimony of her attachment to him, which his imminent danger now forbade her to disguise longer under a mask of badinage, Lester concentrated all his energies to the task before him. He felt that before the lapse of one or two hours, which it would require to get ropes from the cove which was more than a league distant, the inconvenience of his position would have left him with little strength to climb the cliff, even with the assistance that might then be rendered. He was now in the full possession of his physical and mental energies, and resolved, without longer delay, to avail himself of them. Taking the cord, which he had demanded for a very different intention, he fastened one end around his wrist; then leaning backward from the rock, sustaining himself by the grasp of one hand on the chain, he threw it upward with such accurate aim that it passed through the bow next above the one with the stranded string, and fell down within his reach. He then loosened it from his wrist, firmly secured the ends to the lower bow on which he was sustained, and so made the cord supply the place of the weak bow-string, and bear the whole strain. This done, he prepared to ascend the smooth face of the rock twenty feet to the foot of the tree. Grasping the cord with both hands, he

braced himself in a horizontal position, one of most imminent hazard which demanded all the coolness, self-possession and physical strength he was possessed of, and began literally to walk up the perpendicular side of the precipice. The stranding of a string; a sudden strain upon the tensely bent bows; the least deviation from the horizontal, would have been instantly fatal! Coolly, slowly, steadily, lifting himself, step by step, hand after hand, he at last got to a level with the tree, firmly grasped one of its roots, and by its aid sprung lightly upon the shelf on which it grew.

His preparations had been watched, and it was told Kate Bellamont that he was preparing to ascend. But the maiden had yielded her full heart to her woman's nature; and while he was making the perilous ascent, with her head lifted from her mother's bosom, and with tearful eyes and clasped hands, she was looking heavenward, breathing a silent prayer for his safety. A shout of joy announced to her his success! Once more she dropped her face and wept with joy. Lady Bellamont, who felt that all had been done that circumstances admitted of, refrained from watching his perilous feat; and, while she solaced her daughter, calmly directed Cormac the forester to steady the rope, and keep it from rubbing against the rocks.

Quitting the chain, Lester now ascended the tree to the transverse branch, which he had scarcely reached when a loud crack at the root warned him that the scathed solitary of the cliff, unused to such repeated trials, was giving way under his weight. Hardly had he time to throw himself upon the chain, and hang by a bowstring with one hand, when a series of loud reports rapidly followed each other as one after another the roots snapped; the top of the tree waved wildly to and fro, and then

the huge trunk plunged, crashing and roaring, into the flood beneath. For an instant afterward the appalled Lester continued to cling to the fragile chain with nervous solicitude; but at length assured that he was not to be carried along with it into the frightful gulf, he prepared to continue, by the same process of horizontal walking he had hitherto adopted, his upward progress to the next shelf, six feet above him, and with which the top of the tree had been on a level.

The effect of the fall of the tree on those so deeply interested above can scarcely be imagined. Lady Bellamont answered the heavy crash by a wild shriek, echoed by all around save Kate. With her the dreadful suspense and anxiety were now lost in the certainty of his fate. She calmly raised her head, approached the cliff with a firm step, and looked steadily down, not with hope, but with a settled gaze of despair, as if she would take a last look at his grave, and for ever impress upon her heart's tablet his sea-covered tomb. It was at this moment of her soul's anguish she confessed within her own heart that, notwithstanding the lightness with which she might have attempted to disguise it, she loved him with all the fervour and devotedness of a first passion. Approaching the verge with such feelings, her surprise was only equalled by her joy when she saw him in the act of climbing on the shelf above described. A joyful cry escaped her; and the bold youth, looking up, acknowledged her presence with a proud smile and wave of his hand. From this moment Kate Bellamont was herself again. He was safe! The change from grief to joy in her countenance was electrical! and she prepared to watch and aid his ascent with all the coolness and energy she was possessed of.

He had accomplished thus far his arduous task in comparative safety; and as he had now but twenty feet more to ascend, she looked with confidence to its successful accomplishment. This space, however, save a shelf within eight feet of the top on which the young fisherman had alighted, and the zigzag crevice by which he had descended the remaining twelve feet, was steep as a wall, and as difficult of ascent. The young man, after having hitherto passed through such trying scenes, was not now to be daunted by any obstacles, of whatever magnitude, that opposed his farther progress. Nerving himself to the effort, he grasped the rope, which here had taken the place of the chain of bows, and extended himself, as before, into a horizontal position, meeting and returning with a smile, as he did so, her look of solicitude. As he slowly and laboriously ascended, she inspired the men to their task of keeping the rope from the cliff, often assisting them with her own fingers, till at length she was rewarded by seeing him safely reach the shelf, and stand within eight feet of the summit. By her direction the men now bent the projecting branch of the tree until it was within his reach; when, aided by one hand placed on the rope, he lightly climbed the limb, and with a spring stood in safety on the top of the cliff.

Kate, who had scarcely breathed as she watched this final effort, guided by the impulse of the moment, flung herself at once, grateful, happy, weeping, into his arms!—so certain it is that true love will out, give it occasion to speak for itself! And what fitter one than this? At such a time, love is both deaf and blind. It sees, hears, knows no voice but its own; is indifferent to the opinions of a world of witnesses, and, setting aside all canons of propriety and discretion, abandons it-

self to the impulses of its ardent nature. Such was the love of Kate Bellamont.

But love, like all other emotions, is but short-lived in its excess. The temporary excitement passes away; reflection follows; notions of propriety return; and the conscious victim, blushing, mortified, angry with shame, feels that there *is* a world of witnesses to whose canons she is amenable, and shrinks at the judgment that will be passed on her outrage of its received notions of maidenly propriety. Such, the next moment after abandoning herself to the first wild gush of joy at his escape, were the thoughts that rushed thick on the mind of the proud and sensitive maiden. She sprang away from him; hid her face in her hands; and, for the moment, scarcely knew whether her wounded feelings would have vent in tears or laughter. True to her character as "Wild Kate of Castle Cor," the latter prevailed; and, exposing her face, she broke into a fit of merry laughter, which was caught up and continued, with many a lively witticism, by those around, who, the moment before, were sad and gloomy under the pressure of fatal forebodings: for so wonderfully, yet wisely, is the human heart constituted, that smiles never come so readily, and are never so bright, as when heralded by tears.

The gratified Lester was too happy to receive such an ingenuous, impulsive token of her love, and of its deep, womanly sincerity, to feel hurt at this change in her manner, which his good sense enabled him to refer to its true cause. With deep and silent pleasure, he felt that that moment had fully repaid him for all he had risked.

Grace Fitzgerald, who had been by no means an indifferent spectator of his hazardous adventure,

now advanced, grasped his hand with great warmth, and congratulated him on his safety.

"You need not look so very fond, Sir Cragsman," she said, gayly; "I am not about to follow the example cousin Kate has so generously set for us. Oh no! What with your exploit and Kate's folly, you will be completely spoiled for me! I dare say you would go down that horrid place again for another such hug as my cousin Kate gave you. Really, I am shocked!"

"I will go down and take the leap off into the sea for a similar reception from Grace Fitzgerald," said Lester, with an air of gallantry.

"And do you think I would come near such a dripping monster as you would make of yourself? No, no, I am no Nereid to fancy a man coming out of the sea."

"By which I infer, fair lady," he said, archly, "that, if I will go down and come up dry, you will give me such a welcome as—"

"Kate gave you? Really, you are quite spoiled. Kate, come and take care of your beau cavalier, for he is no longer fit for any company but yours. But here comes one I will welcome, dripping or dry!"

She bounded forward as she spoke, and met, at the head of the path, the gallant fisher's lad, who just then appeared, on his way up from the water, bearing in his hand the ger-falcon which had been the cause of putting in peril two human lives. He was accompanied by the old fisherman, who, having remained on the summit of the cliff, paralyzed and inert through alarm and anxiety until assured of his safety, had gone down to the beach to meet him on his return. She approached the young adventurer with one hand extended to welcome him,

the forefinger of the other at the same time lifted with censure.

"I will shake hands with you, Mark; but you deserve, handsome as you are, to have your ears boxed. See what a to-do you have been the cause of; and all for that great black bird, which Kate, forsooth, must shoot instead of sending her arrow at the target. Well, you are a noble and gallant young man, and I like you. Do you hear that, Kate? I too have made a declaration! Well, but I won't embrace you, I think, for you are too wet."

While the lively girl was speaking, the rest of the party, including Lord Robert and Kate, approached and joined in welcoming him.

"My brave Meredith," said Lester, frankly extending his hand, "you deserve a better career than that before you. Henceforth let us be friends."

The hand of the young noble was received without embarrassment and with a native dignity of manner by the humble youth, that, to all present, atoned for his want of high birth; while he said, with a firm yet respectful tone,

"We may not be enemies, but we can never be friends, Lord Robert: friendship between the high and low is but another name for dependance to the latter."

"I fear you speak too truly, Mark," said Kate, who had congratulated him on his escape with an honest warmth and sincerity of manner that sent the blood like lightning to his brows.

"Not in my case, brave Mark," said the noble, earnestly; "I will become your patron and—"

"And is there patronage without dependance, my lord?" he asked, in a quiet tone.

"Well, well," said Lester, colouring, "have it

your own way. You have pride enough for Lucifer!"

"But not enough for a noble," said the other, with a very slight curl of the lip.

"Mark Meredith," said Kate, reprovingly, "you forget your station. A proper degree of pride is the secret of independence. Perhaps you have too much. Lord Robert is sincere, and means well by you."

"Believe her, Mark," said Grace Fitzgerald, with playful raillery; "nobody ought to know so well what Lord Robert means as my cousin Kate."

"Stop your saucy tongue, Grace," said the maiden, placing a finger on her bright lips. "What will you now do, Mark, with this bird, that has cost us, through your thoughtlessness, so much anxiety and suffering?"

"And betrayed a secret that was not quite a secret before," said the mischievous Grace.

"Grace, prithee hist!" cried Kate, with a spice of asperity.

"Give me the bird, peasant!" said Lester, in a tone of authority. "I will nail it on the door of the lodge at Castle More, in honour of the fair archer who shot it."

"Here is the gentle owner," replied the youth, turning towards Kate Bellamont; and gracefully kneeling as he spoke, he gallantly laid the bird at her feet, saying,

"Gentle archeress, deign to accept—it is the only boon I crave for my peril—this trophy of thy skill. I have obtained it for thee at the risk of life and limb, valuing neither, so that I might do thee a service, and save what I know thou wilt be proud to preserve in remembrance of this day."

"By the cross! a forward youth! an Alfred in disguise, I would swear!" said Lester, haughtily,

his quick spirit kindling at the scene. "He will be offering next, fair Kate," he added, scornfully, "to share with thee his palace of bark and poles, and his wide realm of sand and seashells. S'death! a proper peasant!" The young noble's eyes sparkled, and he paced the sward with angry impatience, as he concluded.

Kate Bellamont was not indifferent to the tone, manner, and language with which the hawk was presented by the humble youth. She was flattered by his well-directed compliments, and pleased, without knowing why, with the deep, silent admiration with which he regarded her. Was it the language of love? His manner reminded her of Lester in his most impassioned moments of devotion; but there was in the fine face of the young fisherman a calmer, sweeter, more chastened expression; a reverence without humility; devotion without awe. Was it love? She trembled, as she thought so, and dared not a second time meet his dark-beaming eyes. The peculiar character of the expression of his face was read aright by none but herself and Lester: for only love and jealousy can translate the language of love. The light blue eyes of the young noble flashed fierce fire as he witnessed what he deemed palpable proof of his suspicions. His glance turned rapidly from the face of one to the face of the other. The expression of his maddened him; that of hers troubled and puzzled him; and he turned away, grinding his teeth with bitterness: for what is there on earth so bitter as jealousy?

The contrast between the appearance of these two haughty young men was as great as that existing between their ranks in life. The young noble was in his eighteenth year, tall, and firmly made, with uncommon breadth and expansion of chest, which gave a striking appearance of compactness

and muscular finish to his frame, that promised, in manhood, nobleness of carriage as well as great personal strength. His complexion was fair as the Saxon's; his features regular as the Greek's; but, unlike his, stamped with that union of manly grace and strength, and bold, fiery energy, supposed to be characteristic of the ancient Briton. Over his clear, high forehead fell locks of light flaxen hair of rare beauty, and shining tresses of the same pale, golden hue floated about his shoulders. His eyes were his most remarkable feature. They were large and blue, clear as light, and of a beautiful shape, glowing with intellect and sparkling with animation, and, when undisturbed, beaming with a soft and gentle expression betokening gayety of temper and lightness of spirit; but, when roused by anger, they flashed fierce fire, and seemed literally to blaze, so bright was the light they emitted. They further possessed a striking peculiarity, which so marked his angered glance that he who once encountered it never forgot it till his dying day. This was a habit, or, rather, nature had given it to him, when under the influence of angry passions, of lowering his brows down over his eyes in such a way as to destroy their fine, oval form, and give them a strange, triangular shape; and the pupil of his eyes darkening at the same time till they grew black as night, communicated to them a singularly wild and terrible expression.

His lips were very beautiful both in form and colour; but the upper wore a haughty curl that marred the beauty of a mouth which nature had chiselled with the nicest hand. He carried himself at all times with a gallant but proud air; and his demeanour was like that of the highborn youths of his time, taught to regard all of low degree as created for their use and pleasure. His faults were

those of education rather than of the heart; and, where these deeply-grafted prejudices were not attacked, he was frank, noble, and generous, and not unworthy the love of a noble maiden like Kate Bellamont. At the moment seized upon to describe his appearance, he was standing within a few feet of the young fisherman, his eyes sparkling with anger and assuming that remarkable shape which has been described, with his head and one foot advanced, and his whole attitude hostile and threatening.

The fisher's lad, who continued kneeling for an instant at the feet of the fair archeress awaiting her acceptance of the trophy he had presented, met his dark look unmoved, and, as he thought, with a smile of proud defiance. The appearance of this bold youth, whose bearing caused the haughty Lester to question if nature had not a nobility of her own creation, was, save in his proud carriage, strikingly opposite to that of the young noble. He was about the same age, and nearly as tall, but had not such fulness in the chest, and was wanting something of his breadth of shoulders; but his figure, if lighter, was more elegant, and united great muscular activity with native dignity and ease of motion. He wore fishermen's loose trousers, with a coarse jacket of brown stuff, and was both barefooted and bareheaded. His face was exceedingly fine. It was oval in shape, with an olive complexion, still more darkened by exposure to wind and sun: now, with the glow of exercise and the magic presence of her before whom he bent, it had become of the richest brown colour. His dark hair was glossy with sea-water, and, parted naturally on his brow, fell in long raven waves adown his well-shaped neck. His eyes were dark as hers

on whom he gazed, exceedingly large-orbed, and eloquent with thought and feeling.

"What handsome eyes!" thought Grace Fitzgerald, as she gazed on them.

"What dangerous eyes!" thought Kate.

His eyebrows were as even and accurately arched as if pencilled; but they were redeemed from anything like effeminacy, on account of the delicacy of their outline, by the intellectual fulness of the brow. His nose was straight, and of just proportions; his mouth beautiful as a girl's, yet full of character, decision, and strength, and oftener it was the seat of dejected thought than of smiles. Its expression was generally quiet; yet the finely chiselled lips were full of spirit; and, when silent, seemed most to speak, so eloquent were the thoughts that coloured them with their ruby life. The merest movement of the upper conveyed the intensest feelings with the vivid rapidity of the lightning's flash, whether they were begotten of scorn or irony, love or hatred. His bearing, as well as his appearance, was above his station; and he manifested a haughty independence of spirit that scorned the distinctions of rank, and a pride of character that, in one of his humble grade, was not far from being closely allied to audacity. But perhaps this only proceeded from a certain impatience at being compelled, nevertheless, to admit in his own person a conventional inferiority to those with whom he felt he was on that broad basis of equality, the elements of which are equal physical and intellectual qualifications.

Though a poor fisher's lad, he possessed all the feelings and sensations common to humanity, and experienced emotions both of pleasure and pain; could feel disgusted at what was revolting, and be

pleased at what was agreeable. He shared, therefore, with all men, of whatever rank, from the prince to himself—for there could scarcely be a lower scale—that mysterious principle of the heart by which it attracts, and is attracted to, woman—he beheld Kate Bellamont, and this moral loadstone, acting as nature intended it should do, irresistibly drew him towards her. Without reflection, without cherishing either a hope or a fear, but simply happy in the contiguity, he gave himself up to the new and delightful sensations produced by the flow of love's magnetic fluid through his heart. In plain words, the poor fisher's lad fell deeply in love with the highborn heiress of Castle Cor.

No one of the wonderful phenomena of the human mind so fully demonstrates that it is a mesh of anomalies, as the existence of the fact that, when a man loves a woman, he has only to learn that another regards her with the same flattering sentiments, to hate him most cordially, seek him out, quarrel with him, and even take his life. It would seem to be taken for granted that the knowledge of this fact would have a directly contrary effect; for the presumption irresistibly follows, that whoever feels an interest in the object to which we ourselves are so closely bound by ties of love, must, without regarding the delicacy of the compliment to our individual tastes, be proportionably loved by us. But experience has too often demonstrated this by no means to be the case; but, on the contrary, the knowledge of the existence of a parallel attachment produces in the breast of the legitimate admirer wrath, malice, and hatred, filling his soul towards the subject of it with all manner of evil.

True to this feeling of the human heart, the young noble and fisher's lad forthwith felt rising in their

breasts towards each other emotions of a hostile character; for love is a famous leveller, and the prince can deign even to hate his slave if love raises him to a rival. In one of the youths it manifested itself in the cool expression of defiance: in the other, by haughty scorn and indignant surprise.

When the fisher's lad had finished his manly and gallant address, he modestly continued to await, with his hand upon the bird, the acknowledgments of the fair maiden. Gratified, yet embarrassed, Kate remained silent, knowing not how to reply to the chivalrous lad, who, under the magic tuition of love, had suddenly assumed a character that alarmed her; who, all at once, had been converted, as if by a spell, from the quiet, yet handsome fisher's boy, who was accustomed to attend her in her excursions along the beach, into a bold and daring lover! She could not be insensible to the compliment. She loved Lester with all her heart; therefore she could not have requited the youth's boyish love, had his blood been noble as her own. Yet there remained a place in her heart for kindly gratitude, and with a smile that sent the quick colour to the forehead of the boy, she said, in a voice that thrilled to his soul,

"I thank you, Mark, for the gift. I will keep it in remembrance of your courage, as well as a trophy of my skill in archery; notwithstanding, I fear good Cormac will lay claim to it, as it was hit with his own arrow. It would make a brave ornament, with its wings spread at length above the door of his cot," she added, turning to the old forester, who stood respectfully on the outskirts of the party that was gathered about Mark and his ger-falcon.

As she spoke her thanks she extended to Mark her hand, which he took with blushing embarrassment, and, after a moment's hesitation, gracefully

carried to his lips. The eyes of the young noble sparkled with anger as he saw the offer of the hand, but they shot forth a menacing glare as he witnessed the act on the part of the youth: turning on his heel with an execration, he would have left the ground but for the eye of Kate Bellamont, which he caught fixed upon him.

"Come, Mark," said Grace, "you must join us all in the pavilion; for you need refreshment after your fatigue. I wish, Robert, you would present him with one of your green hunting-suits. I declare, I should like to see if he would not outbrave you all. Do! good Lord Robert."

"You are perfectly crazy, Grace," said Kate, aside.

"Am I?" was the quiet reply, accompanied by a quizzical look, which conveyed far more than the words to Kate's comprehension, and made her, in spite of her efforts to maintain indifference, look exceedingly foolish.

"You are all beside yourselves, I verily believe," said Lester, in a tone that his accent alone made biting; "I have no doubt whatever that it would oblige you excessively, Lady Grace, if I would exchange attire with your fishy favourite."

"Really, Lord Robert, I wish you would. I have a curiosity to know what sort of a fisherman you would make. I dare say a very nice one, save a spice or so of pride, that would hardly suit your station."

"Pride in a peasant is impertinence. But 'tis an attribute most congenial to the station, I discover," he added, with cool irony, "and doth recommend its possessor, I see, most particularly to the favour of noble ladies."

"I advise you, then, Lester, when you chance to fall in their good graces," said Kate, assuming

the same tone, yet qualifying its bitterness with good-humour, "that you renew your suit under a fisher's garb; believe me, it will assuredly restore you to favour."

"I have no hesitation in believing it," said Lester, in a grave tone, and with a marked emphasis of manner that excited both maidens to laughter; but he was far from participating in their merriment, and turned from them with an angry brow.

"I have delayed the banquet too long with this folly," said Kate; "hie to the pavilion, fair archers and gallant esquires all," she added, gayly, "and I will soon follow you. As for you, Mark, I will send to you some of the choicest viands on the board, and cousin Grace shall be the bearer of them. Cormac, take up the hawk."

"This honour will please Lord Robert better," replied Grace, glancing at him with an archly malicious look.

"Lord Robert will have nothing to do with this piece of folly," cried he, in a tone that made her start. "By the cross of Christ! peasant, if you betake not yourself speedily to thy hovel, I will hurl thee with mine own hand from the cliff upon its roof."

As he spoke he advanced upon him. Mark looked apologetically at Kate, and then sprang to his feet, and confronted him with that calm courage which had hitherto characterized him. His coolness maddened the impulsive Lester, and with a bound he leaped upon him, and caught him by the throat; but, ere he could get his fingers firmly clinched upon his windpipe, he reeled violently backward by the force of a blow upon his chest, dealt with a skill and accuracy of aim that compensated for any inequality of physical strength. With eyes darkening with rage, he recovered himself, and

seeing lying not far from him on the ground his short hunting-spear, he snatched it up, and launched it at his breast with a force and direction that would have transfixed him on the spot but for his presence of mind; anticipating its flight, he quietly moved from its path, when it passed within a few inches of his head with a loud whirring noise, and, striking against a distant rock, shivered into a thousand fragments.

"Robert Lester," exclaimed Kate Bellamont, with a flashing eye and a voice of indignant horror, "by that act you have forfeited all that belongs to you as a noble gentleman, and also," she added, with deep feeling and a proud spirit, "all that connects you with any person (I speak for all) that is here present."

"Pardon me, lady," he said, throwing himself at her feet, and attempting to take her hand.

"Never, Robert Lester. Touch me not! Leave me—leave me! Leave us all! The farther festivities of the day will be marred by your presence!"

"Lady—"

"Silence, assassin!" and the dark eyes of the roused heiress of Bellamont flashed with such a light as might burn in an indignant seraph's.

"Ha!" he cried, starting to his feet, "this to me!"

"This to you, Robert Lester, who now have made yourself lower than the meanest peasant. I degrade you from your esquireship; and, faith! if the more noble Mark Meredith shall not take your place. Mark, approach and be my esquire of archery!"

The youth proudly smiled, but hesitated.

"I command you. As true as my father's blood runs in my veins, thou art the more noble!"

"God of Heaven! this is too much to bear calm-

ly," cried Lester, his eyes assuming that remarkable shape that characterized them when his anger had grown to its height.

"Mercy!" cried Grace Fitzgerald, with real alarm; "what a fearful look! I wonder," she added, with a slight touch of her usual manner, "that I ever could have had the courage to coquet with such a terrible creature."

The fierce noble made no reply, but, glancing from her to Kate, looked pleadingly, as if about to speak; but she shook her head with a motion scarcely perceptible, but in a firm manner, that left no hope to his repentant spirit. Striking his forehead violently, with mingled shame and rage he rushed from the spot towards the castle, and walked rapidly until he disappeared behind an angle of one of the towers. Kate Bellamont followed him with her eyes, her brow unbent, her proud manner and high-toned look unchanged; but, when he could no longer be seen, there was perceptible a struggle on her eloquent countenance to restrain the emotion with which her heart was full. With an even voice and forced gayety, she said,

"We will now to the pavilion, maidens fair and cavaliers; and I trust this rudeness of yonder haughty boy will not mar our festivities. Mark, you will attend me. What! has he gone too? God grant two such fiery youths meet not again this day."

"Didst observe, my lady," said Cormac, who had been a silent spectator of the exciting scene, "didst take note of that look out of the eyes of Lord Robert? Well, if it did not remind me of Hurtel o' the Red Hand, as if he had stood before me."

And the old forester ominously shook his head, as if it contained something very mysterious, yet untold, and followed the party to the pavilion, whither

they had already directed their steps, to partake, with what spirits they might after the scenes that had transpired, of the luxurious banquet therein spread for their entertainment.

Here Kate Bellamont, who preserved a calm dignity the while, and, save to the eye of Grace, whose generous spirit sympathized warmly and sincerely in her feelings, betrayed no outward signs of emotion, with a tranquilly-spoken excuse for her absence left them and fled to the castle: she ran through its long hall like a hunted hart; flew up the broad staircase to her boudoir, and entering it, closed the door. Then uttering a gasping cry of suffering, she threw herself, with a wild abandonment of passion, upon a seat; the fountains of her bursting heart, so long choked up, were opened; and she gave way to an irresistible flood of tears.

It is ever thus with woman! Although, in the moment of just resentment, pride and anger may for a while check the flow of affection, and harden the wounded heart as if bound about with bands of steel, yet love will return again, dissolve these bands, and convert resentment into tenderness. It is its nature to obliterate all dark spots that wrong may have cast upon the heart; to palliate offences, and to forgive even where forgiveness is a weakness: it makes itself half sharer of the fault; is ever ready to bear the whole weight of the blame, and with open arms to receive back again, without either atonement or acknowledgment, the guilty but still loved offender.

In a few moments the current of her feelings had changed. She thought of the thousand noble qualities of Lester's head and heart, shaded only by the faults of pride of birth and a hasty temper.

"For these," she asked of her heart, "shall I break his high spirit? For these shall I inflict a

pang on his noble nature? For these, which among men are regarded praiseworthy attributes of highborn gentlemen—for *these* shall I make him unhappy, and myself—for it will kill me—miserable? Oh, Lester, dear Lester, I was too, too cruel! You had cause for anger; but oh, that fatal spear! Would that it had been far from your hasty arm!"

At this moment she heard the sound of horses' feet moving rapidly across the court towards the forest. With a foreboding of the cause she flew to the lattice, and beheld Lester, mounted on his coal-black steed, galloping at the top of the animal's speed away from the castle, each moment burying his armed heels into his sides, and riding as if he would outstrip the winds. For a moment she watched him with an earnest gaze, then threw open the lattice, shouted his name, and waved her hand! But his back was towards her, and he was too far off to hear even *her* voice calling him to return; and in a few seconds afterward he entered the wood. With tearful eyes she saw the last wave of his dark plume as he disappeared in the winding of the road; and, leaning her hand upon the window, she sobbed as if her young heart would break. Oh love, love, what a mystery thou art!

CHAPTER III.

"Alas! the love of women! it is known
To be a lovely and a fearful thing;
For all of theirs upon that die is thrown,
And if 'tis lost, life hath no more to bring
To them but mockeries of the past alone,
And their revenge is as the tiger's spring,
Deadly, and quick, and crushing; yet, as real
Fortune is theirs—what they inflict they feel."

Don Juan.

KATE BELLAMONT gazed after the departing Lester until his receding form became indistinct, and his dancing plume mingled with the waving foliage of the forest into which he rode; she then bent her ear and listened till his horse's feet ceased longer to give back a sound, when, overcome by the depth and strength of her feelings, she leaned her head upon the lattice and wept like a very child; at length she recollected the duties that devolved upon her as entertainer of the party of archers; and, forcing a calmness that she did not feel, she descended to the lawn, and once more mingled in the festivities of her birthday.

Notwithstanding all her self-possession, her eyes often filled with tears when they should have lighted up with smiles; and even her smiles were tinged with sadness! And how could it be otherwise, when her heart and her thoughts were at no moment with the scenes before her? She longed for the day to close—for the night to approach—that she might fly to her solitary chamber, and there, hidden from every eye, indulge her feelings. At length the long, long day came to an end, and with it departed the youthful company on horseback to their several homes. A gay and gallant appearance the cavalcade presented as it rode

away from the castle—a youthful cavalier prancing by the bridle of each maiden, and a band of armed retainers of the several families bringing up the rear. Kate bade them adieu, and stood in the hall-door following them with her eyes till the last horseman was lost in the windings of the forest; she then flew to her chamber, and, turning the bolt of her door, cast herself upon her bed and once more gave free vent to the gushing tears which she could no longer restrain.

Twilight was lost in night: the round moon rose apace, and, shining through the Gothic lattice, fell in a myriad of diamond-shaped flakes on the floor; yet had she not lifted her face from her pillow since first she had buried it there, though the violence of her grief had long since subsided; and so still was she that she seemed to sleep. But the soft influence of this gentle blessing was a stranger to her aching eyelids. Her soul was sad and dark! her sensitive spirit had been wounded! the wing of her heart was broken. Her thoughts rushed wild and tumultuous through her brain, and her young bosom, torn by strong emotions, heaved like the billow when lashed by the storm. She mourned in the silence of her heart's depths, without solace, and without hope; condemning her own hasty act, and, like a very woman, excusing his conduct by every invention that her true love could find in palliation.

All at once she was disturbed by a light tap at her door. She started suddenly, aroused from that world of troubled thought in which she had so long been lost to the exclusion of everything external, and lifted her face. Her surprise was great on seeing the moon looking in upon her, and filling her little room with an atmosphere like floating dust of silver. A glow of pleasure warmed her

heart, and an exclamation of delight unconsciously escaped from her lips—it was so calmly bright, so richly beautiful! Like a blessing sent from heaven, the sweet moonlight fell upon her soul, and all the softer and holier sympathies of her nature were touched by its celestial beauty. She approached the lattice and threw it open, forgetting the cause that had aroused her from her mood of grief, in admiration of the loveliness to which she had awakened.

A second tap was heard at her door. She started with instant consciousness; and throwing back from her face the cloud of raven ringlets that had fallen about it, tried to assume a cheerful look, and bade the applicant enter.

"I can't, cousin Kate," said the sweet voice of Grace Fitzgerald, in a low tone; "you have locked yourself in."

Kate blushed, stammered something, she scarcely knew what, in excuse, and turning the key, admitted her mischievous cousin.

"In the dark, Kate!" exclaimed Grace, as she entered.

"'Twere sacrilege, cousin, to bring a lamp in presence of this lovely moon! Come stand by the lattice with me," she said, throwing her arms about her and drawing her towards her.

The fair cousins leaned together from the window and looked out upon the silvery scene. There was something in the quiet loveliness of the lawn beneath, spangled with myriads of dewdrops like minute fragments of diamonds; in the deep repose of the dark woods; in the majesty of the ocean, which sent its heavy, sighing sound to their ears with every passing breeze; in the glory of the glittering firmament, with the moon like a bride walking in its midst, and in their own lonely situation,

which the silence of the castle and the lateness of the hour contributed to increase, to make both silent and thoughtful.

At length a deep sigh escaped the bosom of Kate, and Grace turned to contemplate her unconscious face, as with thoughtful eyes, her head resting in her hand, she gazed on vacancy, evidently thinking on subjects wholly separated from the natural scenery before her.

"Dear Kate," said Grace, after watching for some time in silence the sad, pale brow of her cousin, and speaking in a tone of tender and affectionate sympathy; "dear Kate, I pity you!" She gently threw her arms about her neck as she spoke, and, drawing her towards her, kissed her cheek.

The touching sincerity of her manner, unusual to the merry maiden, came directly home to her heart. She felt that she was understood; that her sorrow was appreciated! She struggled with virgin coyness for a few seconds, and then, yielding to her increasing emotions, threw herself into her arms and wept there. How grateful to her full heart to find another into which it could freely empty itself! How happy, very happy was she, that that heart was, of all others, her beloved cousin's! How unexpected her sympathy! How soothing, how welcome to her sad and isolated bosom! At length she lifted her face, and, smiling through her tears, said, after dwelling an instant on the lovely features of her cousin,

"You are a sweet, noble creature, Grace! You don't know how happy your kind sympathy has made me! and all so unlooked for! Yet I know you will think me very silly; and I fear your natural spirit will break out again, and that you will, ere long, ridicule what you now regard with such sweet charity!"

"Believe me, Kate, I feel for you with all my heart. I could have cried for you a dozen times to-day, when I saw how very unhappy you looked!" she added, with tenderness beaming through her deep shaded eyes.

"And yet, dear Grace, I think I never saw you so gay, nor those little lips so rich with merry speeches," pursued Kate, playfully tapping her rosy lips with her finger.

"It was for your sake, dear cousin Kate. I saw that your feelings were wrought up to just that point when you must either laugh or cry, and one as easy for you to do as the other; so, trembling lest, in spite of yourself, you should lean towards the tragic vein, I did my little best to make you laugh."

"You were a kind, generous creature, Grace," said the maiden, with a glow of grateful energy in her manner. "I have not half known your worth, though you have been full six months at Castle Cor."

"And now, just as you are beginning to know what a nice, good cousin I turn out to be, I am, hey for merry England again!"

"I cannot part with you, Grace; my father must sail to-morrow without you. You will stay with me, won't you?" she added, with sportive earnestness.

"I have twice delayed my departure, and poor father will need my nursing in this recent return of his old complaint. I fear we may not meet again for many years. I shall then," she said, with her usual thoughtlessness, "perhaps, find you Lady Lester! Forgive me, cousin Kate," she instantly added, as she saw the expression of her face change; "I am a careless creature, to wound at one moment where I have healed at another. But," she added,

with playful assurance, "this may yet be even as I have said! Nay, don't shake your head so determinedly! Lester is not so angry that a word from you will not bring him to your feet."

"Cousin Grace, do you know what and of whom you are speaking?" said Kate, startled that her feelings should have been so well divined; shrinking with maidenly shame that the strength of her love and the weakness of her resolution should be discovered to her observing cousin, and involuntarily resenting, with the impulse of a woman at such a time, the imputation.

"Indeed I do, dear coz! so do no injustice to your own feelings by denying them. You will forgive Lester if I will bring him to your feet?" she inquired, archly.

"Yes—no—that is—"

"That *you will*. Very well. Before to-morrow's sun be an hour old, he shall kneel there."

"Not for the world, Grace!" she cried, trembling between fear and hope; her love struggling with the respect due to her maidenly dignity, which she could not but feel, still, that Lester had outraged.

"I don't care for your words, Kate; I know they mean just the opposite of what you say. Robert Lester shall kneel at your feet to-morrow morning, and sue for pardon for his offence," she added, with gentle stubbornness.

"Without compromising my—" she half unconsciously began.

"I shall not compromise you in the least. There shall be no syllable of concession on your part mentioned; let me manage it my own way, and see if you do not love each other the better for it yet?"

"Coz!" she cried, placing her fore finger on

her mouth reprovingly, yet pleased and smiling with the first dawnings of bright returning hope.

"I am glad to see you smile once more, and I am resolved you shall yet be happy," added Grace, who had shown that, beneath the light current of gayety that usually characterized her, there was a flow of deep and generous feeling; and that, with all her thoughtless levity, she was susceptible both of the sincerest attachment and of the warmest friendship. Her words conveyed the germe of hope to the breast of her cousin. Her confident manner inspired confidence; and the happy Kate, giving herself up to the direction of the sanguine feelings her language and presence had caused to spring up in her sinking heart, became all at once a different being.

"If I am happy in the way you mean, I shall owe it all to you," she said, kissing her. "Now for your plan, my sweet diplomatist."

"Now for my plan, then. That Lord Robert has gone home very angry indeed, there can be no question. Now, when a lover is angry, justly, with his mistress, he will be ever ready to meet her, not only half, but the whole, of the way, to bring about a reconciliation. When he has no right to be angry with her, and is so foolish as to be so, how much the more readily then will he be brought to her feet! There is a spice of argument for you. Now, as Lord Robert has no cause in the world to be offended with you, it follows that he has every cause in the world to induce him to acknowledge his offence, and ask pardon therefor on the very first opportunity. Now all that he wants cheerfully to do this, it appears to me, is the assurance that, after such a philippic as that with which you were pleased to send him off, he will be received graciously."

"But how, if I should be inclined to be gracious, sage cousin of mine, is Lester to know it?"

"That will very easily be brought about, I think. Let me see!" and she seemed to muse very profoundly for a few seconds. "Ha! I have it. I will borrow that curious locket he gave you—"

"Locket, Grace—Lord Robert gave me!" repeated Kate, colouring, and looking out of the lattice as if some interesting object had at that moment drawn her attention.

"Yes," replied Grace, dryly, and with a look of the most provoking positiveness.

"It is no use, I see, to conceal anything from you, mischief! How *did* you know he gave it to me?"

"Young ladies are not wont to take from their bosoms a boughten trinket, and slyly kiss it a hundred times a day, and—"

"Grace, Grace!" cried Kate, attempting to stop her saucy speech.

"And sleep with it under their pillow."

"Cousin Grace!"

"I have done," she said, quietly.

"You well may be. Oh, if I do not wish you had a lover, that I could repay you in kind!"

"Perhaps I have!" was the imperturbable rejoinder of the maiden.

"I dare say fifty whom you call so. Among the gay Oxford gallants, the heiress of a coronet could not be without admirers; but oh, if I knew only of one *lover* who could set that little heart of yours a trembling!"

"You forget your locket, cousin," said the other, gravely.

"What shall be done with it, Grace?"

"Send it to Lester, with this message: '*He who returns this gift of love to her who sends it, shall*

with love be met.' Now is not that very pretty, and as it should be?"

"What a wild creature! Would you have me send such a message to Lester, child? He would think me jesting with him."

"No, never. Is it not just what you want to say—what you feel—what you wish, above all things, he should know you feel?"

"Yes, indeed, Grace," she replied, with the most ingenuous naïveté.

"Then it shall go. Give me the token. Nay, part not with it so reluctantly; 'twill soon be back, with a prize worth a thousand of it. Give it me, coz. Nay, then, kiss it! and so will I."

"No, you shall not!" cried Kate, with laughing earnestness.

"Oh, I *do* hope *I* never shall be in love!" said Grace, getting possession of the locket. "Here is pencil and paper. Can you write by this moonlight? Lovers, methinks, should write by no other light." She spread the paper on the window as she spoke.

"Write! what do you mean, Grace?" exclaimed Kate, with surprise.

"I mean for you to put down, in your nicest hand, my gem of a message to Robert."

"Never, Grace. What will he think of me?"

"He will think you love him very much."

"Just what I don't wish him to think," she said, with singular decision.

"Was there ever!" cried Grace, holding up both hands. "Well, this love is an odd thing! What instinctive coquetry! Like John Milton's Eve,

> 'All conscious of your worth,
> You would be woo'd, and, not unsought, be won.'

I don't understand this disguising love under a

show of coldness—seeming to hate where the heart pants and glows with devotion. Oh, if this be love, I'll none of it. Here is the pencil, and there is a fair sheet, and the moon is patiently holding her silver lamp for you; will you write?"

"I will, to gratify you, cousin Grace," she said, taking the pencil and placing her fingers lightly on the paper which lay in the window.

"To please *me!* very well, be it so. Who could have believed, a quarter of an hour ago, that I should have had to coax you to send a line to Robert Lester! You may well hide your telltale face."

Kate bent her head over the gilded sheet and began to write, or, at least, to make characters with her pencil, when Grace, impatient at her slow progress, looked over her shoulder and exclaimed;

"Why, what are you writing? *Lester Robert, Robert Lester, Robert Lester, Lester Rob*—."

Kate glanced at what she had written, hastily run her pencil through it, and said, with a mortified laugh,

"I had forgotten what to write."

"And so put down what was deepest in your memory," said Grace, with a vexatious air. "Now take this fair page, and write as I repeat:

"'*He who shall bring again this gift of love to her who sends it, shall with love be met.*'

"Is it written?"

"Letter for letter."

"And you will find that each letter will act as a charm. Never so few monosyllables as I have strung together here held so much magic."

"Who will be its bearer?" Kate now inquired in a lively tone.

"I will find a Mercury both sure and swift," she said, folding the locket in the billet.

This *gage d'amour* was oval in shape, of plain gold, with a chased rim, a little raised, enclosing an azure field, on which, in exquisite enamel, were inlaid the crests of Lester and Bellamont, joined together by two clasped hands: beneath was the sanguine motto,

DURANTE VITÂ.

"Now, coz, for one of your raven ringlets to bind around it!"

"No, I will not, Grace!"

"Then I will tie it with a lock of my own hair," she said, in a sportive manner, running her fingers through her auburn tresses; and, selecting one that was like a silken braid for its soft and shining texture, she prepared to sever it from her temples.

"You provoking child, you will have your own way," said Kate, shaking forward the dark cloud of her abundant hair, and intwining her finger in a jetty tress that rivalled the sable hue of the night swallow's dark and glossy wing.

"Half an hour since you verily would have parted with every lock to be assured the sacrifice would bring him to you; and now, forsooth, scarcely will you part with a strand to bind a note. There!" she added, clipping a beautiful ringlet that Kate had selected from the rest; "now all that is wanted is wax—no, not that! I will fasten it with a true-lover's-knot, which will be far better; will it not, coz?"

As she said this she looked up with a bright light dancing in her dark hazel eyes; and, without waiting for a reply, in a few seconds tied, with great gravity, the mysterious knot she had mentioned, and gave the billet to her cousin for the superscription. "Write, 'These: to the hands of Robert, Lord Lester, of Castle More, greeting,'" she said, with gravity.

"Nay, I will direct it simply 'Lester, Castle More,'" she said, decidedly.

"By which," said Grace, laughing, "you avoid the distant respect conveyed in my own on the one hand, and the tenderness that is ready to gush from your heart on the other. Love certainly does make his votaries skilful tacticians! Truly, now, is not this a proper love-billet—written in a lattice by the light of the moon, and tied with a braid of the lady's hair in a true-love-knot? Well, when I am in love I shall know how to manage rightly all these little affairs."

"Who is to be our Mercury on this occasion?" inquired Kate, with a little doubt in the tones of her voice. "I fear we shall have to trust it to a moon-beam also."

"Something more substantial, I assure you," said the good-humoured maiden, in a very positive manner.

"Not one of the menials, for the world!"

"No, no!" she answered, with quickness; and then approaching her cousin's ear, she pronounced, very mysteriously, the very homely monosyllable,

"Mark!"

"That proud boy! *He* become the bearer of a message to Lester!" she exclaimed, looking at her with surprise.

"For *me* he will!" replied Grace, confidently.

"Two such spirits to come in contact! No, no! Have you forgotten how they parted to-day?"

"No."

"Then why do you propose so wild a scheme?"

"Mark will do as I bid him," she said, with a naïve and pertinaciousness that was wholly irresistible.

Kate burst into such a merry, musical peal of laughter, that at first the maiden looked very

grave, but at length found it in vain to withhold her sympathy, and laughed with her; while the rich blood mounted to her cheeks, and invested her with surpassing beauty.

"Oh, oh!" cried Kate, triumphantly, "so you are a *very* little in love! I half guessed it! Doubtless there is blood enough in thy noble veins for both of you."

"Very well, cousin, you may think what you choose," she replied; adding, in a tone and manner that left her cousin in doubt if she were not half in earnest, "but if I were in love with him, is he not noble in person? handsome, gallant, and brave? Why may he not be worthy a noble maiden's love? I would not give him as he is, for Lester, with all his nobility, coupled as it is with his terrible passions."

"Out upon you, jade," said Kate, good-humouredly; "will you revile in this vein my noble Lester—compare him to a fisher's lad? Where is your pride of birth and rank, Grace Fitzgerald! Really, I should not wonder if, with your levelling notions, you should some day throw yourself away upon some one unworthy to wear so fair and rich a flower in his bosom."

"I have both wealth and rank, and shall be my own mistress soon! that I will give my hand where my heart goes, you may rest assured, cousin Kate," said the maiden, with spirited, yet sportive decision.

"Marry come up! I shall not wonder if I come to be cousin to a cordwainer's 'prentice yet! I shall assuredly allow you to go to the good old earl, your father, to-morrow, and shall not fail to bid him, in a letter, to lock you up."

"Love laughs at locksmiths, you have heard it said, cousin. But a truce to this. I am not yet

in love, so be not alarmed. I will sally forth and find Mark, and at once despatch him with this message to Castle More."

As she spoke she threw a cloak over her shoulders and prepared to envelop her head and face in its hood. At this crisis Kate's troubled countenance indicated a wavering purpose; and as Grace was fastening the hood beneath her chin, she laid her hand on her arm:

"No, Grace, you must not. Lester will scorn me; let him go for ever first!" she added, in a sad, irresolute tone of voice.

"No, no! In ten minutes afterward you would be playing Niobe. Have your feelings towards Lester changed an iota?"

"No; but—"

"Yet you know not, if you delay, how his may change, nor what rash act he may commit!"

"I will send the token," she said, after a moment's struggle.

"I will soon return with news of my success," she said, placing her hand on the latch of the door.

"Go, then, quickly! But you will not venture to the beach alone?"

"'Tis light as noonday! A step across the lawn, and a short trip down the path, and old Meredith's hut is within a stone's throw. I will not be three minutes gone."

"I must certainly go with you, Grace."

"Not for the world!"

"Lest I interrupt the tender moonlight interview you have in prospect with the handsome fisherman, I dare say. Ah, you arch girl! I verily believe you have an eye to your own interests, which accounts for your devotion to me in this matter," said Kate, laughing, and shaking her head at her.

"A fisher's lad!" she repeated, in the slightly scornful tone her cousin had hitherto used.

"Nay, I was not in earnest, Grace," said Kate, apologetically, kissing her as she was leaving the chamber.

"Nor was I," replied the lively maiden. "Watch me from the opposite window as I cross the lawn. Courage, dear cousin! You will soon have Lester at your feet, and be folded in his--"

"Go!" cried the blushing Kate, closing the door upon her ere she could finish her sentence.

She listened to her light footstep echoing through the hall till it was lost on the lawn; then turning to her window, she shortly afterward discovered her gliding across the archery-field towards the cliff, and, with a wave of her hand towards the lattice, rapidly descend the path that led to the beach. With her heart fluttering with mingled hopes, fears, and desires, she sat watching in the window for her return. Her thoughts the while were busy. She followed, in imagination, the message to Castle More; pictured Lester's reception of the token; fancied his surprise, his rapture, perhaps his scornful indifference! No! she would not believe he could feel *this*, for she judged his truth by her own! Then, in her imagination, she heard his loud and hasty demand for his horse! she could see him on his swift course towards Castle Cor. He approaches! she can almost hear his horse's hoofs in the court! the next moment he is kneeling at her feet for forgiveness! Wonderful power of the imagination! How delightful to yield the soul to its influences when the images it paints on the mind are all pleasing; all as vivid as the reality of which they are only the shadows! While the meditative maiden is leaning from her lonely lattice, indulging her happy visions, the mind naturally

turns to the adventurous Grace and the young fisher's lad, who was to become the bearer of the message which should be the magical instrument of converting all these delightful dreams into reality.

After the attack upon his life by the impetuous noble, taking advantage of the exciting scene that followed between him and Kate Bellamont, Mark quietly withdrew from the party, gained, unobserved, the path, and was out of sight, far down the cliff, before his absence was discovered. He had remained long enough, however, to witness the disgrace of Lester, and to hear the indignant and bitter words of the offended maiden. With a fleet foot he reached the beach, hastened along the shore to his cot, and, crossing its lonely threshold, cast himself upon a block by the hearth, and buried his face between his hands. His heart heaved strongly, and he seemed to labour under deep and great emotion. It was clearly apparent that he was undergoing a severe mental struggle, and that the tide of his life would turn on the issue. At length he lifted his fine face and looked around upon the interior of his humble home; poverty and its signs met his eye wherever it fell! His glance then rested on his own coarse habiliments, and he started to his feet, and with a lofty expression of resolution and an air of stern decision, said, half aloud,

"This day shall end my servitude to poverty. Because the accident of *birth* has cast my lot within these wretched walls, and made me fellow-prisoner with penury, therefore shall I not throw off my chains when I will? Have I not a soul—a mind? Do I not think, feel, act, speak, like those whom men call noble? May I not, in spite of nature, yet become the builder of my own name—

the carver of my own fortunes? By the light of the bright sun, I will no longer be the slave of others! the 'lowborn serf'—the 'humble fisher's lad'—the peasant, hind, and what not, that means baseness of birth and degradation of soul! No; henceforth I will take my place among the highest of them all, or leave my bones to bleach on the sand!"

He paced the bare ground-floor of the wretched shed for a few moments with an energy of tread and a determined air that well harmonized with his words. At length he stopped short in his excited walk; his face assumed a gentler aspect; and in a voice low and melancholy, he continued,

"And this beauteous being, whose bright form fills my dreams like a celestial visitant; who is in all my thoughts; whom to gaze upon at an *humble* distance is bliss; whose voice strangely thrills my soul: her, for whom I would lay down my life! whom to make happy I would forego all earthly, ay, future hopes of happiness, I am forbidden to love! I cannot gaze on her without reproof! I am denied the bliss of speaking to her and listening to the music of her voice in reply; of attending her in her walks; of sharing in her pursuits and pleasures, because I am *lowborn*. Yes, I am 'the poor fisher's lad!' and scarce deemed worthy to be her footman. My approach into her presence is rudeness! my adoring gaze vulgar impertinence! *I am the fisher's lad!* 'Tis not for such to love such a glorious creature! Though his heart may be of the noblest mould; his taste refined; his spirit proud; his nature lofty and aspiring, yet he may not love where love points him. 'Tis not for him to place his affections on the gentle and lovely: on those worthy of his heart's deep devotion, and to whom he can distribute the rich treasure

of his love. He must degrade his pure and sacred passion by linking his fate with one of his own class, who may never appreciate him; or let his wealth of love exhaust itself on his own life, and consume it with its fire! Nevertheless," he added, with a sparkling eye, "the fisher's boy dares to love, and love *high!* Love knows no rank. I have placed my affections on a noble object, my gaze on a lofty eyry—and never will I clip the wing that once has taken so high and bold a flight. I love her! highborn as she is, I have dared to send my thoughts up to her! Yet, alas!" he continued, moodily folding his arms on his breast, and speaking slowly and bitterly, "alas! what shall this avail? Will she requite the daring love of a peasant? Will she not scorn—will she not laugh at me? Will she listen to the deep outpourings of my passion? No, no, no! She must mate with *her* mates, and she would bid me mate with *mine!* Yet, may I not rise above my condition," he exclaimed, with a glowing brow and flashing eye; "may I not win rank and name that shall make me worthy of her? Shall I stand here idle, and see this haughty Lester bear away a prize of which he is no more worthy than I? No, I will perish first. From this day I am a man! Henceforth I belong to no degree, no rank. I am to choose what I will be. This hour I burst the degrading fetters that chain me to the class in which birth has cast me. From this moment I am the architect of my own fortune, and I will erect a temple that men shall admire, or bury myself beneath its ruins! The sea, on which I have been cradled, is open before me like a mother's bosom, welcoming me to its embrace; and on it, with the aid of God and my own spirit, I will win a name that shall hide the humble one I wear, and under it yet lay at the

feet of her, who would scorn me under my present one, laurels that shall have made me worthy of her love!"

As he concluded his cheek was flushed; his eye sparkling; his step rapid and firm; his countenance elevated and glowing; and he strode the little cabin as if he was for the moment all that he had resolved to be. He was so lost in his feelings, so wrapped in the noble vision of the future his ambitious and ardent mind had pictured, that the old fisherman, who had slowly followed him from the cliff, entered without attracting his notice. The aged man gazed on the animated and excited youth with astonishment, and for a few moments was silent from surprise. At length he called him by name. He started, and was for the first time sensible that he was not alone:

"Well!" was the short, stern response.

"Do you know who speaks to you, my boy?" asked the old man, with mild reproof.

"Yes I do, my good father," he said, instantly resuming his wonted kindness of manner, and taking his hand; "forgive me; I had forgotten myself!"

"Do not be angry, child, at this freak of my young lord," said the old fisherman, in a tone habitual to his class in speaking of those above them; "it was but a little outbreak of spirit; and you know it is not for the like of us to be angry at the nobility for such things. They are our lords, and we must do as they will."

"And let them take my life—ay, if they will, make me their slave, which is far worse! Never! 'Tis the language of a bondman you utter, and unworthy the lips of manhood!"

"You talk as if you was one of the quality, boy! You will find it different when you get to be as old

as I am. I have put up with many wrongs in my day from gentle blood."

"And have not resented it?" demanded the youth, with spirit.

"What could a poor fisherman do? Is it not their right to act what they will to? We poor fishermen have only to pray to God to give them gentle wills towards us!"

"And is this the creed you would teach me? Debasing, grovelling, mean obedience to the tyranny of an order! Before I do it, may my hand wither at the shoulder, my tongue palsy in my mouth! I should indeed deserve to be a slave! You would forbid me to resent this wrong from this hotheaded young noble?"

"It will do thee no good; if thou shouldst take his life, thou wouldst hang for't."

"And if he should take mine?"

"There would be none to avenge thee, boy. The judges, who are always on the side of the great, would say thy life was forfeited because thou hadst lifted thy hand against one of the privileged."

"God! I cannot believe that all men do spring from Adam and Eve," exclaimed the youth, impetuously. "Father," he said, after a moment's silence, speaking in a tone of mingled shame and sorrow, "thou hast, fortunately, a spirit fitted to thy station—I pity thee! For myself, I will be no man's serf, no lord's menial! If accident has made me almost on a level with the brute, nature has endowed me with the feelings of a man. Father, I leave you with to-morrow's sun."

"My child! my child! what evil hath taken possession of thee?" cried the old man, holding him by both hands.

"No evil, but good! To-morrow I go from you!" he replied, resolutely.

"And leave me destitute in my old age, my boy?"

The youth was touched more by the accent in which this was said than by the words. He buried his face in his hands and groaned aloud; then, with a sudden burst of filial affection, he cried, throwing himself upon his aged breast,

"No, no! I will bend my neck to every insult, rather than thou, my more than father, shouldst be left helpless."

"Thou wilt not go away?" reiterated the old man, pleadingly, as if doubting the sincerity of his words.

"Not while thou art spared to me, beloved grandsire. Thou hast protected my infancy and youth! been to me both father and mother. If I be not a faithful son to thee, and protect not thy old age, may I fail to attain the rank and honour among men to which I aspire, and which, if purchased at the expense of filial gratitude, I should be unworthy to wear!"

"Bless thee, bless thee, Mark!" said he, fondly embracing him. "Providence has made our lot a humble one; let us submit to it with obedience. Come, my boy, think no more of it, but launch the skiff, and bring home our evening meal from the vast storehouse that has ever fed us, and which never holds its life even from the undeserving. Go, my son: on the rocking wave, and in the silence of the lone deep, your heart will become calm, and peace will return to your soul. At such times it is that the good and devout Christian is the most happy! I sometimes think the holy apostles did owe much of the holy piety which they possessed to their lowly occupation of fishers."

"*They were Christians. You* are a Christian, father! I am not one save in name. Would to

God I were! perhaps I then might bear my humble lot more calmly. Now farewell a while; I will be in again ere the moon rises."

He rushed from the cabin with his heart almost bursting in his breast, launched his little bark, hoisted the frail latteen sail, and committed himself to the deep.

Seated in the narrow stern of his fragile skiff, the thwarts and bottom of which were covered with fishing-lines, a dip-net, and other signs of his lowly pursuit, holding the rude tiller in one hand and the sheet of his narrow white sail in the other, he shot swiftly out from the shore, wafted by a light and fitful wind. From habit he steered his course, and shifted the sail from side to side to woo the baffling airs, without giving his thoughts to his occupation. His lips were compressed with thought, his brow was set, and every feature of his silent face was eloquent with the feelings that occupied his bosom. His mind was struggling between filial affection and ambition—between love for the highborn maiden and duty to his grandsire. The sufferings of the latter, who looked to his labours for his daily bread, were, if he should desert him, present and positive. The hopes connected with the former were altogether future and uncertain. Should he inflict a present evil for a future good? Would his filial attachment compare with his love? Which should he sacrifice? He felt that he could not make his grandsire the victim, either of his love or of his ambition, without the forfeiture of that filial virtue, wanting which he would be unworthy the prize he should incur this penalty to obtain. His thoughts became insupportable; and, for a time, he was nearly wrought up to phrensy by the intensity of the mental conflict. At this crisis, while his eyes were fixed vacantly on the crisp waves as

they went singing and rippling past him, his bosom far more disturbed than they, he was startled by a loud, quick hail.

"Boat ahoy! Helm-a-starboard, or you will be into us!"

He mechanically obeyed; and, as he looked up, saw the dark hull of the yacht, that had lain all day at anchor in the bay, within reach of his hand, while his boat was gliding safely along its side, directly against which he had been unconsciously steering.

"You must keep a look-out, lad, how you run aboard a king's yacht, or you will stand a chance of getting a shot in your locker!" said a gruff, yet good-humoured voice. "But you have a quick ear and ready hand to clear our counter as you did. What say you to serving his majesty, my lad? It's better than catching herring; and, then, many's the younker of your inches that's come in over the cat-head, and afterward walked the quarter-deck with a brace of gold bobs on his shoulders."

The young fisherman's ears greedily received every word; they struck a chord within his bosom that strongly vibrated again. Involuntarily he put his helm down, and brought his boat up into the wind. He looked longingly upon the vessel's deck; measured the beautiful and light proportions of her hull, and surveyed with delight the graceful spars, following them with his eye to their tapering tops, from which gay flags streamed in the breeze: he admired, apparently with all a seaman's gratification, the tracery and interlacing of the neatly-set rigging, and the snowy sails, some of which were hanging in festoons from the yards, while one or two lazily spread their broad white fields from yard to yard: he observed the neat appearance of the men; their happy faces; their frank, good-humoured

manners: he thought over the blunt but kindly offer he had received, and his hopes whispered,

"Fortune has opened this way for me! my destiny must be linked with this vessel!"

He then thought of his father, and his head dropped despondingly on his bosom; he thought of Kate Bellamont, and his eyes sparkled, and he felt like bursting all filial ties and leaping at once on board.

"What say you, my lad, will you ship?" said the man, observing his hesitation; "I'll give you ten rix-dollars as bounty."

"Now?" he eagerly asked, starting up in his boat, and extending his hands with intense earnestness.

"The instant you enter your name on the yacht's books."

"I will go with you."

"Done! come alongside."

Mark hesitated ere he obeyed. Ten rix-dollars had, at first, seemed to him an inexhaustible sum: a moment's reflection convinced him that it would not support his grandfather six months without labour, for which he was nearly unfitted on account of his age. If, he thought, at the end of six months, therefore, he should not be able to return to him, or if his own life should be lost in the interim, would not the misery and want such an event would entail upon him fall heavy to his charge?

All this passed through his mind as he drew aft the tack and pressed the tiller up to windward to run under the vessel's bows. Instantly he shifted his helm, let the sheet fly free to the wind, and shot suddenly away in the opposite direction.

"He's off with a flowing sheet!" said one of the seamen, laughing.

"He's gone to bid the old man good-by," cried

another; "he'll be alongside before morning, kit and kid."

"He's gone to take leave of his lass," added a third. "A wise lad to anchor his last night ashore."

"I wouldn't lose him for six months' pay," said the captain of the forecastle, who had first hailed him; "but I am afraid we shall see no more of him than what he now shows us," he added, shaking his head, and turning to pace the deck.

Scarce hearing, and heedless of these characteristic remarks, the young fisherman kept on his course seaward till he had got a league from the land, when he hove to and lowered his sail; then baiting and casting his lines, he plied his humble task, his eyes the while often fixed on the distant towers of Castle Cor, and his thoughts now with its fair inmate, now brooding over his own lowly destiny. When at length the sun dipped the edge of his burnished shield into the sea, he for the last time drew in his lines, each heavy with a fish, hoisted his sail, flung it broad to the evening wind that blew gently landward, and, taking the helm, steered towards home. But the wind grew lighter, and soon came only at intervals in "cat's-paws;" his progress was therefore slow, and he was yet a mile from the land when it left his sail altogether. Night came on, and the moon rose above the battlements of the castle, and flung its scarf of silver far out upon the scarcely dimpled bay. From time to time he held his open palm to windward, in vain trying to catch a passing current. He threw back the dark curls that clustered about his forehead, and laid it bare to receive the faintest breath that might promise the return of the wind. But the air was motionless! His boat rose and fell on the glassy undulations, but moved not towards the shore, save by the slow landward

heave of the sea. Springing upon the thwarts, he brailed up his sail and bound it to the mast, and then, bending to the slender oars, sent his light skiff over the water with a speed that mocked the idle winds. He soon got within the dark shadow flung by the cliff along the water far beyond the land, and run his boat on the beach beside his cot. The old fisherman welcomed him with a kindness that not only touched his heart, but rewarded him for the sacrifice he had made on his account. He also assisted him in conveying the fish into the hut, and set about himself to prepare their rude repast. Mark placed his oars in the beckets over the door, and walked out to indulge his thoughts; to brood over his deferred, if not blasted hopes; and to struggle again and again against the unfilial temptations that assailed him. He insensibly wandered along the beach, that sparkled in the moonlight like snow beneath his feet, until he came to the narrow strip of sand that stretched beneath the overhanging cliff from which he had leaped, and connected his hut with the path up the rocks. He looked up to its dark and terrific roof, and then down into the black pool at his feet, and a half-formed wish that he had never risen again from its silent depths, escaped him.

"That I had perished, ere life had been preserved to be dragged out in this miserable servitude," he said aloud. "What is life to me? Its refined joys; its courtly pleasures; its fair forms; its wealth; its honours! This is *my* world—these slimy rocks—this lonely bay; yonder hut my palace, and to fish for daily sustenance my pastime. This is *my* life—this my universe! What have I to do with aught beyond it? The world was made for others, not for me—not for the peasant boy!

No, no! Madness! Must I endure this?" he cried, with fierce impatience. "Filial love, filial gratitude, how bitter, bitter are ye!"

He struck his forehead violently, and turned on the belt of sand with a fevered step. Suddenly he felt a touch on his shoulder, as light as if a fairy's foot had lit upon it. He started, and, turning quickly round, beheld a female, enveloped in a hood and cloak, standing immediately behind him. The grace of her attitude, and the easy decision of her whole manner, assured him that she was not low-born. His heart would have whispered the name that was enshrined in it, but the figure was not tall enough for *hers*. With an instinctive consciousness that he was in the presence of rank and beauty, to which, in this union, his independent spirit never refused to do homage, he doffed his cap, and addressed her with that native grace and dignity which characterized him:

"Lady, seek you aught in which I can aid you, that you have come to the seaside at this lonely hour?"

The moon shone full on his youthful features, which were shaded with locks of dark-flowing hair, parted across his high, pale forehead, and descending to his shoulder. She gazed for an instant, ere she replied, on his youthful face, on each lineament of which his bold character was written, while his ardent spirit spoke eloquently in every look. As he bent forward to catch her answer, with his bonnet in his hand, the cloud had vanished from his brow before the supposed presence of youth and beauty, and his deferential manner, so opposite to his former bearing, seemed to inspire her with confidence.

"My business is with you alone, Mark!" spoke,

from beneath the shaded hood, the sweet, hesitating voice of Grace Fitzgerald, intuitively shrinking within the shadow of the cliff as she addressed him, just out of which, in the full light of the moon, the young fisherman himself stood.

"Lady Grace!" he exclaimed, with surprise, as her voice fell on his ear.

"Grace Fitzgerald, in body and spirit," said she, with her usual gayety.

"Can the highborn heiress of Earl Fitzgerald be served by one so humble?" he asked, in a tone slightly tinged with his former gloomy humour.

She seemed to be at a loss, for a moment, how to reply, scarcely knowing in what way to interpret his words. At length she said, advancing frankly towards him,

"I have not come to command your services, Mark, but to beg of you a favour; to ask you to execute a mission of delicacy, that can be intrusted to no one so well as yourself."

The frank and kind manner in which she spoke, the graceful propriety with which she overstepped the barrier of *caste* that separated them, sensibly affected him. It was the first time he had been so addressed by those above him in birth and station; the first time his services had not been demanded as a right by those who needed them.

Her suavity and condescension of manner were perhaps prompted by the remembrance of the outrage he had received at Lester's hands, and by a knowledge of his intrepidity, and of his pride of spirit, which she knew to be chafed and goaded by the insults inseparable from his station. She therefore generously wished to sooth and bind up his injured feelings. She had, too, her own notions of what constitutes true nobility; and it is plain,

from her conversation with Kate, that she was less governed by the social canons which regulate such things, and was infinitely more of a democrat than her haughty and beautiful cousin. That her heart had anything to do in the matter, though Mark was so handsome, so gentle, and so brave withal, cannot be supposed; inasmuch as the little god seldom ensconces himself behind a peajacket to take aim at a heart mailed beneath a silken spencer. But, then, Cupid is very blind, and, besides, is so given to odd whims, that but little calculation can be made as to the direction from which his shafts will fly.

"Command me, lady," he replied, with grateful emotion, as she concluded.

"Are you angry with Lord Robert?" she asked, falteringly.

"Can I forgive him?"

"But you will forgive him—for—for—the sake of—my cousin Kate!"

"If *she* were to bid me kiss his hand, I would not refuse her," he exclaimed, with a sudden glow of animation.

Grace sighed, and was for a moment silent; for she plainly saw that her influence had but little weight in this quarter in comparison with her cousin's. She then took the locket from the folds of her cloak, and said, in a very slightly mortified tone,

"It is *her* wish that you bear this token of her forgiveness to Lord Robert. You will see that it is tied with a braid of *her own hair!*"

(Was there not a spice of feminine pique in this last clause, lady?)

"Bear this from *her* to *him?*" he inquired, in a voice trembling with emotion.

"Yes."

"Never!" replied he, with vehemence.

"Mark!" she said, in a tone of gentle reproof, placing her hand lightly upon his arm.

"Pardon me," he said, hastily, "but—but—" His voice choked for utterance. "Oh God! Lady Grace," he suddenly cried, with an outbreak of terrible and ungovernable emotion, "you know not what it is to be—to be—" Here his feelings were too strong to be controlled, and, turning his face from her, he gave way to a paroxysm of the wildest grief.

She stood by in silence! She appreciated fully his feelings, for she had overheard the soliloquy he gave utterance to before he had become aware of her presence. She knew what he was and what he aspired to be, and how deeply his degradation preyed upon him. She sympathized with him with her whole heart; and with her sympathy there entered into her breast another emotion, which in woman's heart is so nearly allied to love, namely, gentle pity! When she saw that the first strong tide of his feelings had in some degree subsided, in a voice so full of what she felt that it touched all the finer sensibilities of his nature, and seemed to breathe peace throughout his soul, stilling every billow of passion, she said to him,

"Mark, I do pity you from my heart! I know you are not fitted by nature for the state to which you were born. But to the bold spirit and determined will there is a wide road open to distinction; and in it men, humble as yourself, have won honourable renown, in the splendour of which the mere accident of their birth has been lost. The same road to honour lies open before you!"

The vivid eloquence, the animation of voice, the spirited manner, and the lofty energy of look with which this was spoken, united with the depth and sincerity of her interest in him, which she disdained

to disguise, language can inadequately express. Its effect on him was electrical. He sprang forward, knelt at her feet, seized her hand, and, in the fulness of his heart, pressed it gratefully to his lips. She withdrew it in confusion, and he instantly buried his face in his hands, overcome with the painful feeling of having offended. She was the first to speak.

"Mark, bear this packet to Lord Robert; deliver it into his own hand, and immediately leave him, so that you give him no opportunity of renewing his feud. In the morning, on the earl's return from Kinsale, come to the castle, and I will represent your case to him."

"Dear lady, I will leave this message for you at Castle More; but pardon me if I decline your offer to serve me!"

"Then cousin Kate shall make it," she said, good-humouredly.

"Forgive me, but it will be still more firmly declined."

Grace was puzzled; and half sportively, half sincerely, it entered her thoughts that she had played her hand well if already, as his words seemed to imply, she had found more favour in the young fisherman's eyes than her cousin. But, all at once, the thought flashed upon her mind that it was alone the pride of love that led him to refuse any favour at her cousin's hands.

"You mean," she said in revenge, smiling as she spoke, "that you dislike my cousin Kate so much that you will not receive any kindness at her hands."

"If such could be inferred from my words, I recall every letter of them," he said, with an earnestness that amused her.

"I will then speak for you to my uncle."

"Lady, you will think me very ungrateful," he replied, "but—"

"But you will take no favour from the father of Kate Bellamont. Really, my cousin is complimented."

He was embarrassed by the light in which she seemed to take his words, and, in attempting to explain, involved himself still deeper.

"Do not be distressed; I perfectly understand you, Mark," she said, with a laugh that relieved him. "Will you be obliged to *me?*"

"Pardon me if I say no!" he answered, gratefully but firmly. "No, lady," he added, in a grateful tone of voice, yet sadly, "I must work out brighter fortunes for myself by my own energies."

"I admire your independence. But, if you should need my—I would say, the assistance of any one—will you remember Grace Fitzgerald?"

He did not reply; his heart was swelling, but he laid his hand upon his bosom with an eloquent gesture that conveyed more than words.

"Enough!" she said, touched with his impressive manner. "I shall ever be ready to do for you all that can advance you to name and rank; and for your own sake, for the sake of—" here she paused with embarrassment, and then added, "those who take an interest in you, it becomes you to rise from this humble station, and win for yourself a name and station among men. Do not forget that the proudest names in England sprang from the lowest rank. My own maternal ancestor was a favourite groom of William the Conqueror, who, for his prowess in a certain battle, knighted and parcelled out to him an equal division of land with his own knightly companions in arms. Shall I not yet hear of *you* with pride?" she added, extending her hand to him with characteristic frankness.

"Lady," he said, with animation, "if ever a low-born youth, who would rise above his adverse fortunes, had cause to go forward, have I. The memory of your words will shine like a star of hope to guide me through the future. God help me! Lady Grace, you shall never blush with shame for him in whose fate you this night have shown an interest," he continued, with emotion. "For your sake I will achieve whatever man can accomplish."

"And will you do nothing for my poor cousin's sake?" she asked, significantly, and in a tone of raillery, not able, even at such a time, to subdue altogether her natural temperament.

"There is little hope that one so humble is ever in her thoughts," he replied, doubting, yet half believing.

"Little hope, I fear, while Lester lives," she said, smiling. "But think not of her—think not of love now," continued she, with animation; "let honour be your idol, and woo fame alone as your bride. There are some—there is *one*, Mark, who would rather see you honoured and ennobled by your own hand than—than—but no matter, I have already said too much. Kate will have good reason to suspect I had cause to come alone," she said, mentally, "if I linger here longer;" she then added aloud,

"Fly, Mark, with this message. If you would serve me, bear it safely; if you would do my cousin Kate a favour, bear it quickly; and, lastly, for your own sake, get into no quarrel."

They had insensibly walked along while speaking, and were now at the foot of the path by which she had descended to the beach.

Mark took the packet from her hand, and, as he did so, pressed it with an air of native gallantry

blended with gratitude, greatly to her not unpleasurable surprise and confusion, and then hastened at a rapid pace along the beach in the direction of Castle More. She followed him for a few moments with her eyes, and then, sighing unconsciously (for it is in vain longer to disguise the interest she felt in the interesting fisher's lad), ascended the steep path and safely gained the castle, where, still at her lattice waiting her return, she found her cousin, to whom forthwith she communicated her success.

With a swift tread Mark traversed the curving shore till he had left a full league between him and the spot where he had separated from Grace Fitzgerald. Then striking into a path that led inland, he followed it with undiminished speed, and with a light and confident step, that showed his familiarity with every intricate winding of his moonlit way.

How often he pressed to his adoring lips the locket of hair that secured the billet; how often he paused to read over and over again, by the light of the moon, the delicate characters traced by the pencil her fingers had guided, let each one that has loved enumerate for himself. As he went along, he could not help revolving in his mind the manner of Grace Fitzgerald, and asking himself a hundred times if she could mean anything; and when it could not be concealed from his penetrating mind that she did mean something, or affected to do so—the wish rose to his lips that Kate Bellamont had been in her place. Yet the very next moment, so contradictory is love, he congratulated himself that she was not, feeling that he should never have had the courage to meet her face to face alone, as he had met her cousin. Love surely endows his votaries with a singular union of boldness and timidity! Your lover is either an ar-

rant coward or a lion, and sometimes he is both in one, as he happens to be in or out of his mistress's presence.

At length he came in sight of an ancient and extensive ruin in the midst of the forest, and was picking his way among the fallen fragments, along which his road wound, when he was startled by the sound of horses' feet coming from the direction of Castle More; the moment afterward, he saw, by the light of the moon, two horsemen emerge from the wood, and rapidly approach the ruin. He instinctively drew to one side of the path to escape observation, when he heard one of them utter an exclamation of surprise; both then suddenly reined up, and, from the sound of a third voice, they appeared to be holding conversation with some one they had unexpectedly encountered.

CHAPTER IV.

"Away, away my steed and I
Upon the pinions of the wind!"

Mazeppa.

"Thou false fiend, thou liest!
I do defy—deny—spurn back and scorn ye!"

"That thus a son should stand and hear
The tale of his disgrace."

BYRON.

THE indignant Lester, to whom the story now reverts, had no sooner left the presence of Kate Bellamont and the field of archery, than he hastened to the stables, saddled his horse with his own hand, and threw himself across his back. Then, turning his head northward towards Castle More, he gave him the rein, and, without forming any definite aim or object, but goaded onward simply

by the fiery impetus of his feelings, with a feverish desire to leave far behind the scene of his disgrace, rode away at full speed.

His thoughts were dark and confused; his heart full; his spirit sore! He looked neither to the right nor left, and gave backward glance to turret nor lattice—for he was all unskilled in that book of riddles, woman's heart! and what hope then had he, that he should turn his head for beck or signal of return? If he had been a little more experienced, or somewhat better read in this book of mysteries, where every line of the text is contradicted by a page of annotations, he might have known that a signal would have been flying for him—at the very last moment! But, alas for poor Kate Bellamont! alas for both! her voice, and the wave of her snowy arm were alike in vain! He rode onward, seeing, feeling, being conscious of nothing save his own deep disgrace and misery; and at each fierce pang that reflection inflicted, he buried his spurs deep, and dashed forward as if he would fly from his thoughts, or find relief from them in swift motion.

The forest into which he rode, and in the depths of which he disappeared from the earnest gaze of Kate Bellamont, was very ancient and of great extent, and intersected by many roads winding in all directions through its dark bosom: it was inhabited chiefly by woodsmen and foresters, but contained, besides, two solitary hunting-lodges, a league asunder, appertaining to the contiguous estates of Bellamont and Castle More. At the northern termination of this wood, two leagues distant from Castle Cor, on the crest of a rock that overhung a small woodland lake or mere, was situated Castle More; a single square tower, with a low turret rising at each angle, and defended on the inland side by a

high wall with bastions and a deep moat. It was, at the date of this narrative, the abode of Lady Lester, the widow of General Lord Lester, who had fallen a few years before while gallantly fighting in Spain. Since his death she had withdrawn herself from the sphere of the court, and excluded herself almost altogether from society; devoting her time to the performance of the severe religious duties usually imposed by the Catholic church only on religieuses, and to the observance of rigorous and frequent fasts; and it was rumoured that she even inflicted upon herself painful penance with rods, and slept through Lent in a crown of thorns. In these austerities her friends, and, also, sensible and discreet people, saw only the diseased melancholy of a widowed wife who had been fondly devoted to her departed lord, finding relief, as woman's sorrow often will, in a life of religious seclusion. But the suspicious and evil disposed, the humble labourer and marvel-loving hind, saw in her stern religious life only painful penance for crimes committed in early life, and were wont to shake their heads and lower their voices whenever the "Dark Lady of the Rock" was named.

But, notwithstanding her austere life, Lady Lester was not indifferent to the claims of young Lord Robert. Her heart had been wrapped up in the high-spirited boy from his childhood; and as he grew in stature and grace, next to her graven images, she worshipped him. Unrestrained by paternal fear, and indulged by Lady Lester in every idle wish, he grew up to the age of seventeen with a spirit that never had been curbed; with a temper that never had known a check. Though by nature of a generous and noble disposition, as the unavoidable result of such a course, he was the slave of passion and the victim of self-impulse;

with the will to act justly, but without the power to guide that will: like a noble bark that has lost its rudder and is driven furiously along by its outspread sails, which, managed by skill and discipline, might yet become the instruments of its safety, to irremediable shipwreck and ruin. If educated at all, he was taught to regard all the retainers of his vast estates as vassals; beings of meaner mould; a race of mortals who had somehow smuggled themselves into existence long after Adam founded his ancient family—poachers on the world's manor—now doomed, for their punishment, to crawl as slaves on the earth they had dared to come upon unbidden. He was taught to regard all unnoble as ignoble; and to consider them as an inferior and secondary race, and only created to be subservient to the will of those of his caste and rank. With such notions he became haughty and arrogant, and cherished a spirit of pride of birth, combined with a jealousy of his privileges, that at all times was sufficiently prompt to show itself.

With two such opposite characters; a generous and just one—the gift of nature; an imperious and haughty one—the result of education, he was as uncertain as the wind, variable as the evening cloud. There was but one mind that could control his; one spirit to whose power his own would bend; but one voice that could act upon his passions with a gentle influence, and, with a word, chase the darkest cloud from his brow, even as the harp of the youthful minstrel banished the gloomy spirit of evil from the soul of Saul! This potent person was Kate Bellamont: the wand she used, Cupid's magical bow. By its aid she brought his haughty will in subjection to her own mild sway, and converted the lion into the lamb. She had been his playfellow from childhood; they had strolled, fished, hunted, boated together. Others might be in

company, but somehow Kate and Robert seemed to be attracted to each other by a mysterious affinity: if they fished, he baited her hook and took off the fish when she caught them; if there was a ramble, they were certain to stray off together and lose themselves in the forest, and always were the last back to the castle; if there was a party to sail on the mere, Robert and Kate were sure to be seated near each other!

By-and-by they began to advance into their teens: when Kate got to be fifteen, she began to grow very shy of her playfellow; would not let him kiss her as he was wont; nor ramble with her his arm encircling her little round waist. She ceased running races with him, and began to call him "Lord Robert;" and would blush if he happened to turn and catch her eye fixed musingly upon his face. Robert himself also began to show signs of change. He grew diffident and silent in her company; looked at her for a long time together without saying a word; then would turn away and sigh, and look again, and sigh again. He became less violent, less frequently angry; his voice became gentle and subdued: and he began to show signs of fear in her presence, and trembled if she laid her hand on his arm, which, of late, she was very careful not to do. Indeed, there is no describing half the signs by which their progress from the playmate state of chrysalis to the lovemate state of ripe youth was marked. Robert Lester very soon found that he was very unhappy away from Kate, and very happy in her presence. The maiden, on her part, was not long in discovering that the days were very long when Robert did not visit Castle Cor, and that she thought of him, somehow, a great deal more than she used to do. It evidently was very clear that she loved to look from the battlement of the tower at the four distant

turrets on the top of Castle More, when he was away, much oftener than she had done the year before. Things went on in this manner, though from worse to worse, till about a week before Kate's sixteenth birthday, when it chanced that she and her quondam playfellow were riding slowly homeward, after an unsuccessful pursuit of a stag, which, after having led them within a mile of Castle More, doubled and turned upon its track towards the south, and plunged into a morass not far from Castle Cor; so, as night was approaching, they had given up the pursuit, and turned their horses' heads towards the castle.

They had been slowly riding side by side for some time, breathing their horses, neither speaking a word, but occasionally exchanging timid side-glances in the way young people sometimes do without lifting their eyelids. If by chance their eyes met, both instantly averted their heads, switched their horses, or plucked a leaf; but, in a few seconds, their heads would gradually come round, the pupil of the eyes steal into the corners and again meet, causing a second time very great embarrassment, and very guilty colouring of cheek and brow, as if each had been detected by the other in some crime. So they rode together in this pleasant manner for full half a mile; and one would believe, from their silence and the wide space they guardedly preserved between each other, that they had quarrelled. But their countenances, though grave, looked too happy and sentimental for that; besides, a slight smile, or, rather, just the soft reflection of one, played about their mouths. This for several weeks past had been precisely their bearing towards one another whenever they happened to be alone together; but, when in the presence of others, they both gave way to the highest tone of gayety and spirits. It was all very strange, very!

The lover at length looked ahead, and saw, through an opening in the forest, the towers of Castle Cor not a quarter of a mile distant. He involuntarily reined in his horse, and looked full in Kate's face; his lips parted; he essayed to speak, but his voice adhered to his jaws. So he gasped, sighed, and laid his hand eloquently on his heart. Kate also saw the towers, and reined up at the same moment he did; looked demurely on the ground, and then, as if she had nothing better to do, let fall her riding whip, notwithstanding she had to untie it from her wrist to do so. Instantly Lord Robert threw himself from his saddle, giving the bridle a slight shake as his foot left the stirrup, a hint which the sagacious animal obeyed by bounding off towards the stables, and took it from the ground; then blushingly, and with a conscious look, as if contemplating a daring deed, he presented it to her. As, with averted eyes, she extended her hand for it, he placed in it tremblingly, instead of the whip, his own hand. She neither started nor turned her head, but her young bosom rose and fell quick, and he thought the hand fluttered with a new pulsation as it lay in his. She did not withdraw it. He grew confident, and slightly, very slightly, pressed a finger. Thereupon the little hand only throbbed the quicker. He pressed two, then three fingers, and then, with a boldness that grew with the occasion, he folded the soft, gloved hand all in his own. The next moment he coloured with conscious guilt, and looked up into her face as if about to throw himself upon her mercy. But she was so intently watching the rich dies of a sunset cloud that she evidently did not know what he was about; so, instead of asking pardon and looking very sad, he put on a very happy countenance, and, ever and anon casting his glance upward to her face, began, little by little, to

draw off her glove. But, as she made no demonstrations of being aware of what he was doing, he pulled the glove quite off. For an instant he held it suspended, while he stole a very doubtful glance into her half-averted face; the next moment the warm, snowy hand was pressed between his own, and then, growing bolder apace, he began to cover it with kisses. Hereupon the maiden slowly turned her head and looked down at the bold youth with a look that she doubtless meant to be a reproving one; he cast his eyes to the ground, still holding the quiet hand nestled between both his own, and said, in a soft whisper,

"Kate!"

"Robert!" was the equally gentle suspiration in reply.

"Are you angry?"

"I ought to be."

"Then you are not?" was the half-joyful, half-doubting interrogation.

"No," was breathed in accents so very gentle that it was conveyed to him by the movements of the lips alone.

"Shall we walk to the castle?"

"Yes."

And the young lady, studiously avoiding his eyes, was gently and passively assisted to the ground; as she touched it, his arm glided about her taper waist, and somehow their lips met, and again met, and met again, and met so often, that the horse was far out of sight before the fact forced itself on the mind of the maiden.

"Robert, desist! There! my horse has galloped off!"

"Shall I bring him to you?" asked the delighted youth, in a tone that showed he did not very

much apprehend she would despatch him on such a mission.

"No, we can walk. But it is so foolish!"

"What?"

"Nothing."

And they walked on together for a few moments in silence.

"Kate!"

"Robert."

"Do you love me?"

"Yes."

"May I seal the confession?"

"A fine time to ask leave now!" she said, laughing.

Another kiss, and then another, and then a great many others, firmly sealed this little love affair, and placed them on a perfect understanding with each other. They were from this moment lovers! They quarrelled only twenty times in the subsequent interval of a week that preceded her birthday; than which no greater proof need be advanced to show the new relation in which they stood to each other. But, then, they always made up again; the youth, whose hasty spirit caused him five times out of seven to be the offender, being ever ready to atone by every loverlike device.

But such a sad breach as had been made between them this day was without a parallel. To his own mind it seemed too wide to be repaired; too gross to be atoned for by words. He, on his part, felt that the lofty character and proud spirit of Kate, though love plead never so loudly, would not brook the insult her feelings had received by the wild outbreak of his passions in her presence. He felt that he had forfeited all title to a place in her affections; and that her indignation was justly roused

by the outrageous deed he had madly attempted: with bitterness of heart he acknowledged that he deserved to be banished for ever from her presence, and to be remembered by her only with contempt. But he knew not of what enduring material a maiden's heart is composed; he knew not that, when love takes possession of it, like a magnet thrown among some delicate machinery of steel communicating to every part a portion of its own mysterious nature, it penetrates and pervades every attribute, converts every passion to its own hue, and renders each feeling subservient to itself. To its arbitrament all things are referred. Reason, judgment, prudence, and even piety become secondary to the will of this autocrat of the heart; and a deaf ear is turned even to the counsels of the wise and good when they do not conform to its dictates. Such is the power of love—wondrous, vast, incomprehensible! A religion without a god or a future; unbounded in its power; universal in its extent; all-pervading in its influences!

He galloped along through the winding avenues of the silent forest, scarce roused from his sad meditations by the startled deer that fled at his approach, yet stooping mechanically as some old oak flung its gigantic arm low across the path. Unconsciously he urged on his noble horse to its utmost speed; his bonnet pressed down over his gloomy brow; his eyes dark and settled in their expression; and his hand nervously grasping the rein. At one moment he would drop his head upon his breast, and be overcome by the bitterness of grief. At the next he would throw back his head, and with eyes flashing fire, gnash his glittering teeth, shake his clinched hands above his head, and curse in the face of Heaven; while the horse, catching

his fierce spirit, would erect his bristling mane, and bound madly forward like the wind. These terrible paroxysms of mingled grief and rage would pass away, and then he would ride slowly, with his arms folded, and with an expression of settled despondency. Three several times did he check his horse, and, half-turning him round towards Castle Cor, pause, and seem to deliberate between the suggestions of mingled hope and doubt. But, after a few seconds' thought, he would shake his head despairingly and again spur forward.

In one of his moods of sullen gloom, with his arms folded across his breast, his head drooped, the reins lying loosely upon the horse's neck, he came upon an old ruin half a league from Castle More, and within the boundaries of its wide domain. Here and there, amid a confusion of moss-grown fragments that everywhere strewed the ground, rose to his eye a mouldering buttress; the half of a Gothic window; a ruined tower, lifting itself in melancholy loneliness, in the last stages of decay; or, a doorway choked to its lintel with rubbish. Over all crept the ivy, that lovely emblem of charity, binding up, with its slender fingers, the wounded towers; covering with its thick robe of leaves the nakedness that time had exposed; and, where it could neither heal nor strengthen, wreathing about the dilapidated walls garlands of enduring verdure.

It was the ruins of a chapel, where, centuries before, the barons of Castle More had worshipped. Now all was desolation. Its bell was hushed; its choir for ever silent. The priests—the worshippers, where were they? sleeping beneath the ruins of the crumbling chancel; their high or holy names, which no man remembers, carved deep in the superincumbent marble. Apparently coeval with the

fallen temple, near its eastern end grew an aged tree, spreading over half the ruin its huge broad arms as if it would fain protect, in its desolation, the relics of that structure whose days of honour it had witnessed. A soft evening sunlight, struggling through the tops of the surrounding forest, shed a crimson glow over the whole scene, and imparted a quiet and sacred character to the spot that took from it its aspect of desolation. It stood there lonely and majestic in its ruin, forcibly suggesting to the mind the idea (for there does exist a mysterious sympathy of association between man and inanimate objects) of calm, Christian old age, ripe in years and holiness, gathering about itself, with dignity and grace, its mantle of decay.

Wrapped in his gloomy thoughts, the horseman was absently following the path that wound among the ruins, when, as he turned a sudden angle of the pile, his horse started and nearly threw him from his saddle. Roused to a sense of his situation, he recovered his seat, seized the bridle, and looked up. Directly in his path stood a woman, in a short scarlet cloak, then, as now, the favourite colour of the Irish peasantry, leaning on a long white staff, curiously carved with mysterious figures. She was beneath the middle height, and hideously hunchbacked. Her hair was bright red, of extraordinary length, and hung down in masses nearly to the ground. Around her forehead was bound a cincture of beads, woven into singular devices, which confined a sort of turban of green silk. Her complexion was bronzed by exposure, but evidently once had been fair. Her features were stern and almost masculine, yet bearing traces of feminine beauty: the straight forehead, contracted by a rigid frown; the aquiline nose; the arched brow, and thin, well-shaped lips, with a roundly turned chin,

were all, evidently, wrecks of what had once been beautiful. Her eye was large, full, and clear, and would still have been handsome but for a lurking devil in it. But the unsightly deformity of her person, if natural, must always have served to render nugatory any charm of countenance; and, whatever might have been her attractions in youth, her present appearance was calculated to excite only feelings of mingled fear and disgust. The young man gazed at her a moment as she stood in his path, and then, in a tone that was in unison with his present humour, said fiercely,

"Curses light on thee, hag! Stand from my path, or I will ride over thee, and trample thy hideous carcass with my horse's hoofs."

"Robert Lester, as men call thee," she said, without changing her position, in a cold, hard voice, and with a malicious laugh, "thou hast been crossed in thy will, and art out of temper. Dost wish revenge?"

"Woman, avaunt! I want none of thy counsel. From my path, or I will ride thee down!"

As he spoke, the impatient horseman struck his spurs deep into his horse's flanks, and urged the animal forward; the beast reared and plunged fearfully to either side, but refused to advance.

"Ha, ha, Robert More! If men will obey thee thy brute will not. He has the eye to see dangers that are hidden from mortal vision."

"Witch—fiend!" cried the young man, fiercely, "I will dismount and hurl thee from the path if thou bar my way farther. Stand aside and let me pass!"

And a second time the infuriated rider urged the terrified beast forward, but was nearly unhorsed by his efforts to turn from the road. In an instant he leaped to the ground and advanced upon her. She

smiled scornfully as he approached, caught the arm he extended to seize her, and held him in her grasp with the force of a vice.

"Ha, ha, Robert More! thou art defeated."

Quick as lightning, with his other hand he drew from his breast a hunting-knife, and, elevating it above her head, said, in a cool, decided tone,

"Elpsy, release me, or I sheath this blade in thy heart!"

She fixed her dark wild eyes upon his face an instant, and reading aright its resolute expression, let go her grasp.

"'Tis well for thee, Elpsy," he said, returning the blade to his bosom; "thou hast saved thy wretched life, and thy blood is not on my soul. Now leave the path!" he added, sternly. "By the cross! ere I will be bearded thus on my own lands, I will command my retainers to hurl thee into the sea."

"*Thy* lands! *thy* retainers! Ha, ha, ha, Robert *More!* I have in store a punishment for thee and for thy pride, that will repay me for all thy arrogance! Oh, how thy haughty soul will writhe! how thy proud spirit will groan.! *Have I not a cup for thee to drink?*—Oh, have I! Ha, ha, ha!"

The foreboding words and wild laugh of the hag sunk deep into the soul of the young man. He was impressed by her manner as much as by her language, and, with a changing cheek, said quickly,

"What mean these dark words, Elpsy?"

"Dark! yes, they are dark to thee now, but I can make them clear as the sun at noon; ay, proud Robert of Lester! they shall scorch thee! wither thy soul! cause thy heart to shrink! thy neck to bow! thy head to lie in the very dust! Oh, will not the lowest slave among the vassals that

wait thy word pity thee, when thine ears receive what I would reveal!"

The wild prophetic air, the energy and taunting scorn with which she spoke, alarmed while it enraged him.

"Madness! Woman—fiend! monster of deformity! speak, I command thee."

"*Thou* command *me*, Robert Lester! Well, there will be a time! Wouldst thou know what I have to reveal?" she asked, fixing on him her scorching eyes.

"Beware if thou art mocking my fears! I will pluck thy tongue from thy throat, and fling it to my hounds if thou hast trifled with me!"

"What I will tell thee will be so true, thou wilt indeed wish the tongue that spoke it had been plucked from its roots ere it had given it utterance. Nevertheless, the time has come for thee to hear; and I may no longer delay the recital of what, for thy sake," she added, with a softer manner, "I would bear close locked in my breast to the grave. But," she concluded, in a lofty tone, "what is to be revealed must be made known, though the heaven's were to fall and the earth to quake. Who shall stay the hand of fate when once it is lifted to destroy?"

"Elpsy," said Lester, in a deep and earnest voice, unable to throw off the presentiment of coming evil her words had awakened, "I would believe thou hadst something to make known to me either of good or evil, though of the latter alone I know thou art the minister. Yet, if thou hast aught to say, I am ready to listen, good mother!" he added, in a mild and persuasive tone.

"Robert More," she said, in a voice of superhuman softness, while the frigid and austere character of her face passed away, and her features as-

sumed a more womanly and gentler expression; "those last few words were kindly spoken, and became thee: they have touched my heart—for even Elpsy has a heart," she said, with sarcastic bitterness; "for those kind expressions I would withhold from thee the knowledge of the doom that awaits thee. But it is not for me," she added, in an enthusiastic voice, and with returning wildness of the eye; "it is not for one like me to refuse to obey the decree that has gone forth against thee. As a mortal, I pity thee! as a woman, I could weep for thee! and as—No," she interrupted herself, and muttered, "no, he shall not know all now; he shall not learn all till my soul is on the wing; then, *then* will it be time enough!" She then added aloud, "as the minister of the invisible world, I must do as I am commanded. Robert More, if you can bear to hear what I am doomed to tell, follow me!"

"Nay, Elpsy, speak to me here."

"Obey me!" she commanded, in an authoritative voice, that had a singular power over his will, and which he had not the ability to resist.

Without waiting for a reply, or looking round to see if she were followed, she turned from the bridle-path, and, bounding with great activity and with a sort of mad exhilaration of spirits over the fragments of stone that lay in her way, directed her course towards a low door at the foot of the crumbling tower. He hesitated a moment, and then, leaving his horse cropping the long rich grass that grew among the ruins, followed her. She entered the ruin, and, guided by a dim twilight that penetrated through the top of the ruinous arch, led the way along a covered passage which ran in the direction of the chancel. Its extremity was wrapped in total darkness.

"Elpsy, I will follow thee no farther," he called,

after advancing till he could no longer take a step safely in the impenetrable gloom that surrounded him, while she walked before him with a free, rapid, and confident pace.

"Take the end of my staff," she said, returning a few steps and placing it within his reach.

"Thy cabalistic wand, woman!" he repeated, in a tone of horror, recoiling from her several paces and crossing himself. "Avoid thee!"

Like many among the highborn and educated of that day, Lester was not above the superstitious notions of the times, and assented to, perhaps without firmly believing, the existence and power of sorceresses. Among the great number of these singular beings that about this time rose up and filled the minds of all men, both in Great Britain and the New-England colonies, with pious alarm and godly horror, was Elpsy More, or "Elpsy of the Tower," for by both of these names she was known, who had the reputation, above all others who practised the black art, of being on the most intimate footing with his Satanic highness. Dark and wild were the tales that had gone forth, and were repeated in hall and cot, of the supernatural deeds of this communer with the world of spirits. By the imaginations of the credulous and timid she was invested with powers that could belong only to the Creator of the universe; and it was believed by all good Catholics, that every Whitsuntide the devil came to dine with her in the chancel of the old church, making a table of the marble tomb of Black Morris O'More; who, as the tradition went, sold his soul for the love of a beautiful lady, who turned out to be a fiend, and on the bridal night flew away with him into the regions of wo.

When Lester crossed the threshold of the gloomy gallery, these tales of diablerie had come crowding

thick upon his memory, painted in their most vivid hues by his imagination; and with all his daring his blood ran cold in his veins: nevertheless, he had continued to grope on until he could go no farther, when he called to her. As the staff she offered came in contact with his hand, he had shuddered and shrunk back, remembering how that it was said her crutch was given her by her master, who had charmed it by hardening it in the fires of the ever-burning lake; and that whomsoever she touched with it, or even pointed it to, that wore neither cross, bead, nor blessed relic about his neck, his soul would surely be lost. Lester trembled as these legends passed through his mind, crossed himself, and with great devotion muttered a *paternoster*.

"Here, then, is my hand!" she said, seeing his hesitation.

"Fearful being, I will not go with thee."

"Robert More, obey me! There is my hand. It shall not harm thee," she added, in that peculiar tone which held such a singular power over his volition.

Without replying, he took the extended hand and followed her through the dark passage a few yards farther, when she stopped and said,

"Heed thy footsteps! Here are steps—thou must go down with me."

As she spoke she began to descend a flight of stone stairs into a vault beneath. He would have held back, but she gently and irresistibly led him down, when they stood upright in a damp chamber, in which a faint light struggled through an opening in the floor of the chapel above. The dank, noisome atmosphere of the place, and its subterraneous position beneath the chancel, filled him with awe and fear.

"Woman, whither have you led me?" he asked,

in a voice deep with the mingled emotions of suspicion, alarm, and resentment.

"Into the tomb where rest the bones of Black Morris O'More," she answered, in a voice that sounded hollow and sepulchral.

"Mother of Heaven!" he gasped, "then is my soul lost!"

"Thou wilt little heed thy soul, proud youth, when thou hast heard my tale."

"Be speedy with thy story, then; for, good or ill befall, I will not long remain here."

"Fear not; thou art in no danger! Step cautiously, and I will guide thee across this chamber to my own house. This is only the anteroom to it. Ha, ha!" she laughed frightfully. "See! I have grim Morris O'More to stand guard over my door."

As she said this she struck something, which, in the darkness, rattled like bones suspended from the ceiling of the vault.

"Sorceress!" cried he, shuddering at the sound, "I will go no farther."

"Come with me, Robert More!" she said, firmly; "and see thou fall not over the tomb of Black Morris in the way."

She drew him by the arm as she spoke with a strength far beyond his own. He felt for his hunting-knife, determined to free himself by striking her with it.

"Hold!" she cried, divining his intentions; "I will not harm thee. Here is my abode!"

While speaking, she struck against the opposite wall with her staff, and a door flew open, exposing the interior of a small circular chamber receiving a dim light from the sky, which was seen calm and blue through the roofless tower above.

"Welcome to the abode of Elpsy of the Tower!" she said, with irony. "'Tis not the princely one

thou art accustomed to, but it will serve thy present purpose. Didst know that on thy domains thou hadst such a brave woodland palace? Look about thee!"

The young man entered the room with a feeling of relief that he no longer was in the very sepulchre, though still within reach, of the tomb of Black Morris the accursed. The apartment in which he now found himself originally had been constructed by the priests for the preservation of the sacred vessels of the church in times of hostile invasion of their domains. It was a subterranean room, situated beneath a circular tower or turret that rose at the southeast angle of the chapel. The tower once had contained three floors, one above the other; the mortises for the sleepers being yet visible, ranged regularly and at equal distances around the inner side. The top or roof of the tower, with its battlement and Gothic ornaments, had long since fallen in; and the floors, down even to the ground that formed the floor of the witch's apartment and the very foundation of the tower, had successively decayed and disappeared. The only entrance to this tunnel-like turret was the door from the sepulchre by which he had been admitted. From this vault to the chambers formerly above, access had been obtained by a circular stairway within the tower and conducting from floor to floor, the beds of the beams and fixtures which supported them still remaining in the masonry. The object of these once-existing upper chambers of the round tower is involved in mystery, though tradition hath given to the "three tower-chambers" each their own wild tale of dark superstition and priestly crime.

As he stood in the vault in the bottom of the tower, and looked far out at the sky, it was like

gazing upward from the bottom of a well. The light came in strongly at the top, but grew fainter and fainter as it penetrated deeper, till only a dim twilight reached the chamber below. He recognised the tower as the loftiest of the ruin which often he had made a landmark when hunting, and ascertained thereby his position: this discovery rendering him more at his ease, he turned to survey the subterranean abode which Elpsy had chosen.

In the midst of the floor was a heap of cinders, on which stood a small iron kettle, apparently the only utensil she used for preparing her food. A stone escutcheon, broken from one of the tombs, served her for a seat, and a pile of fern and leaves for a bed. These constituted all the necessaries that her singular and solitary way of life called for. But there were other objects that attracted his attention, and thrilled his blood as he gazed on them. Beside the door, its bones tied together with strips of deer's hide, hung a skeleton of great size, its ghastly jaws carefully bound up and grinning horribly, and its hollow, bony sockets filled with stag's eyes wildly staring at him. Sculls, cross-bones, and other hideous mementoes of the charnel-house were arranged along the sides of the walls; while charms, amulets, and all the numerous instruments of sorcery lay about. Through the open door he beheld the stone effigy of Black Morris, which had slided from its recumbent posture above his tomb by the sinking of the earth, standing nearly upright, staring with his stony gaze into the round chamber, before which swung the skeleton of which his tomb had been despoiled. The tomb itself was open, and its black sepulchral mouth yawned as if it would gladly receive a new occupant.

Terrible to Lester's nerves was the trial produced by this scene. Bold and fearless as he was by nature, he could not suppress emotions of fear (the cowardice of superstition) at the situation and circumstances in which he had suffered himself to be drawn by the taunting language of a wild weird woman, who not only was the professed enemy of all mankind, but had manifested hostile feelings towards himself. He nevertheless resolved that, having adventured, he would go through with it, trusting, with religious faith, that all good saints would help him against spiritual foes; while for protection against mortal ones, ay, even Elpsy herself, he trusted to his own coolness, and, if it should come to that, the broad sharp blade of his hunting-knife. Having fortified his mind with this resolve, he felt more confidence; and being now in some degree familiarized with his situation and the ghastly objects around him, he turned to address the sorceress, who, on entering, had seated herself on a scull, and, with her chin buried between her hands, continued to fix her dark eyes upon his face with a mingled expression of pity and malignant triumph. Before he could speak she rose, and, laying her hand on his arm, said, in a tone between sadness and derision,

"How like you my abode, my lord?"

"'Tis a gloomy place."

"Ay, and many a gloomy day have I spent in it. Sit ye down on that stone, *Lord Lester!*" she added, laying a peculiar emphasis upon the last two words; "'tis a knight's shield, and should be a fit seat for *thee!*"

"Is it thus, Elpsy, you use the sculptured armour and the sepultured bones of my ancestors?" he said, in an indignant tone.

"*Thy* ancestors?" she repeated, scornfully. "Sit

thou there, *Lord Lester*. Dost hear, Lord Lester? Open thine ears, and drink in the title and style well—for 'twill be the last time they will fall upon them."

"Cease your mockery, woman! Say what thou hast to say, and quickly."

"Listen!" she said, seating herself on a scull opposite to him, while a struggle between sympathy and malicious exultation was visible on her features. "Young, and fair, and brave to look upon withal!" she said, muttering to herself, and gazing on him steadfastly and thoughtfully; "a coronet would grace that brow even as if 'twere born to it. Robert Lester, or Robert More, for men call thee both," she said aloud, bending her face towards him, and speaking in an impressive manner, "now listen to the tale I have in store for thee. Fix thine eye upon me that I may see it blench as I go on. Oh! it's a tale for a Christmas eve, I trow!"

She was silent a few seconds, as if sending her thoughts back through the past; then, in a low voice, which rose or fell, was wild or sad, slow or rapid, as her subject moved her, she began:

"Eighteen long years ago there dwelt by the seaside a poor fisherman, honest, hard labouring in his vocation, but contented with his lot, never having known better. He was a widower, but had an only daughter, his sole companion, and the only link that bound him to his kind. This child grew up to be a tall and comely maiden. Her eyes were of the rich brown hue of the ripe chestnut. Her hair, soft as the floss of Florence, was a fair brown; but when the winds that came off the sea would toss it in the sunlight, there played over it a blaze of gold. It never had known confinement, but floated like a sunset cloud about her head."

"What has this to do with thy tale?" demanded Lester, impatiently.

"Listen!" she said, calmly but firmly; her features, as her thoughts seemed to dwell pleasurably on the beauty of the maiden, becoming more humanized, while her voice modulated and harmonized with the words she uttered. "This fair maid grew up, unknowing and unknown; budding and blooming like a lone flower by the seaside. Her laugh was merry as the carol of the glad lark as it soars and sings; her spirits were light as the sparkling foam of the summer's sea; her heart as pure as the moonbeam that slept on the wave. Her happiness was in her father's smile and in his paternal love; and, besides her little cot, and the wide sea which she loved, and the tall cliff that towered above her home, she knew not, until she had entered her eighteenth year, that there was any other world. Alas, for that maiden, that she had not remained in ignorance! Alas, for her, that her heart was not as cold as the moonbeam it resembled in its purity! One black and stormy night, a voice, shouting for aid, reached the ears of the old fisherman and his child, heard above the howlings of wind and roaring of the angry deep.

"'Rise, my child!' he cried, 'there is life in peril.'

"In a few moments they were by the seaside, and by flashes of lightning beheld a small bark driving towards the shore before the tempest. On its prow stood a group of men, who waved their arms wildly as the lightning showed to them the forms of the old man and his daughter standing on the beach, and shouted for help. Swift and irresistible, like an affrighted courser, the fatal vessel drove onward, now lifted high on a surge, now plunging into a yawning chasm, till at length, borne to a great height on a wave, she trembled an instant on its top, and then, descending like an arrow,

struck against the bottom and was dashed to pieces. Wild, fearful, unearthly was the shriek that pierced the ears of the fisherman and his child! They looked where, a moment before, it went careering over the foaming billows, and the lightning gleamed only upon fragments of the wreck, human heads, and wildly waving arms. One solitary cry rent the air after she struck, and then naught but the shriek of the winds, like a human wail, and the tumult of the sea as it lashed the shore in its fury, was to be heard."

"What has this to do with the tale I came hither to learn?" asked the youth, impatiently; nevertheless, had he listened to her with interest, deeply impressed by the energy of her voice and manner, as she warmed in her narrative.

"Much," she said, quietly. "Listen! The fisherman, with his hair streaming in the wind, and his garments wet with the spray, long traversed the beach to see if human life had been cast on shore. He was accompanied by his daughter, who, with her golden locks glancing in the lightning, her lofty forehead calm and firm with womanly energy, and her fair young face lighted up with the noble spirit that inspired her to the task, looked like some bright spirit of peace that had come to stay the tempest. They watched by that lonely shore till the dawn broke, when, by its first faint glimmer, the maiden discovered an object like a human form lying on the edge of the sea beside a rock, whither it had been tossed by the stormy waves. With a cry between hope and mistrust she sprang fearlessly towards the object—for, in the stern duties of humanity to its suffering kind, fear nor false delicacy have no place, and, if they had, that maiden was too good, too ignorant of life to know either. As she came close to it, she saw that it was the

body of a man. She placed her hand upon his temples. They were warm. He was alive! Alas, far better would it have been for her had he been cold as the stone beside which he lay! His pulse was very faint; she could just feel it throb like a fine chord vibrating against her finger. He was lying upon his side naturally, like one in sleep. It was not yet light enough to see whether he was young or old, but she knew, from the soft smooth skin of his brow, that many winters of manhood had not passed over his head. With her aid her father bore him to their hut, and, after bathing his forehead and hands in spirits, and applying for his restoration the few but effective means known to those whose lives are passed on the sea, he opened his eyes, and, after a little while, was able to sit up. After having waited a few moments to recall his faculties, he seemed to have become conscious of his situation, and the fatal cause which led to it: with a smile of gratitude he looked up, and, glancing first at the father and then at the daughter, acknowledged, in a voice and with a look that thrilled to the heart of the poor maiden, how much he owed them for their exertions in saving his life."

"This is a long story, Elpsy, and, methinks, little to the purpose!" interrupted Lester.

"Listen! His language was courteous, and his speech addressed alone to her: his manner was also gentle, and such as would please a maiden. He got up and walked to the window to look out upon the beach, which was strewn with fragments of the wreck; and, as he did so, she was struck with his noble figure, and proud, soldierly air; and the soft sadness that came over his face, as he surveyed the melancholy relics of his gallant vessel, touched her heart. He was not above thirty years of age, with a high, fair brow, and a check, though

sunburnt, bright as a child's. His hair was of a silvery hue, that harmonized with his complexion, and flowed long and in shining waves about his shoulders. His eyes were as blue as if they had been mirrors to reflect the summer's sky, and, as she met them, were tender, yet ardent, in their expression. His smile was fascinating, and his rich voice was full of melody and most manly in its tones. Poor fisher's daughter! She gazed on him bewildered with love, and lost her heart ere she scarce knew she possessed one! He turned away from the window, and his eyes met the fervent gaze of the maiden. She blushed; her eyelids fell; her young bosom heaved tumultuously, and the worldly-wise stranger read her heart at a glance.

"The evening of that day (for hour after hour did he linger beneath the fisherman's lowly roof) they sat together in the door of her cot. He took her hand, and told her, in a low, gentle voice, how he had sailed homeward from Spain, where he had been fighting as a soldier; and how, with his companions, he had been, the last night, driven by the tempest on that inhospitable shore when within five leagues of his destination; and how that he had lost much treasure by the shipwreck, but that her presence had made him forget all he had lost; that her smile repaid him for all that he had suffered. Poor maiden! The hours wore away, yet they seemed minutes to her; the stars came out, and the tardy moon rose! He discoursed to her of love, and she listened! Her ears drank in his words! Her heart was no longer her own. He told her that he loved her, and received her ingenuous confession in return. He then told her of a brave tower, that stood amid broad lands five leagues northward, which owned him as master,

and this, he said, he would make her the mistress of if she would become his bride. She believed and promised. He then said he must leave her, but would return in a few days in a fair ship, and claim its fulfilment. The next morning he took his departure. She wept sorely in his arms when he left her. But, ere her father, who had been pursuing his daily toil on the deep, returned, she had dried up her tears and clothed her face with smiles to meet him, lest her sorrow should make him sad. She did not tell him of her love or the promise of the stranger: it was the first time she had harboured a secret in her guileless heart. She was silent from maidenly modesty; for, with the love that had got into her heart, had entered many new feelings hitherto unknown to her.

"Sad and heavy passed the days, when one evening, as she stood upon the beach looking, now southward for the light skiff of her father, and, much oftener, northward for the expected bark of her lover, she saw the evening sun glancing on a white sail that appeared coming round a promontory a league distant to the north. It bent its course towards the beach. Her heart fluttered. She knew not what to do for joy; and, in her impatience, could have flown along the white sand to meet it! Steadily it bore down towards her. She now forgot to look for the little skiff of her father; her eyes were fixed alone on the coming bark! It approached nearer and nearer. She could see forms on the deck. As it came closer, high on the poop, standing alone like its master spirit, she discovered her lover. He waved his hand to her, and, as she answered it, the vessel came to; a boat was launched, and he sprang into it. A few strokes of the oar sent it to the land, and, leaping out, the handsome stranger clasped the lovely maiden in his arms.

"'Come, gentle maid,' he said, in accents of love; 'come and be the bride of my home and heart.'

"'Not without my father!' she said, looking anxiously to see if she could descry his boat.

"'Think not of him now,' said he; 'he shall soon come, and cheer with his presence your new home.'

"'He will grieve when he finds I have left him,' she said, with filial tenderness. 'I cannot go.'

"'He shall, ere long, see you again,' he said, gently leading her along; 'come, dearest, fly with me to the abode I have prepared for you. This shall be our bridal night!'

"The maiden suffered herself to be borne to the waiting bark; its sails were trimmed to the breeze, and swiftly it cut its way through the crested billows towards the direction from which it came."

"Hast done?" asked the impatient Lester.

"Hear me!" said Elpsy, in a stern tone. "The morning's sun shone upon a dark square tower, with a single wing that looked upon the sea, and his beams penetrated a stained lattice, and fell in brilliant and varied dies on the floor of a chamber within it. In that chamber sat the fisher's daughter; and the fair-locked stranger was bending over her as she sat by the window, dallying with her golden tresses. The night upon the sea had been her bridal night! But, alas! unblessed by priest, unmarked by altar, or prayer, or vow! She was neither bride nor maid."

Here the witch's voice trembled with emotion, while her eyes grew rigid, and her brow became gloomy and fearful to look upon.

"Who did this maiden this foul wrong?" asked the youth, with a flashing eye.

"Hurtel of the Red-Hand!"

"Ha! that rebel Irish chief, who, to save his

head, fled to the Colonies, and who, for his bloodthirsty spirit, got the title of 'The Red-Hand?'" demanded Lester, with interest.

"The same."

"I would have sworn it! Go on."

She smiled grimly, and then continued:

"For many days he was devoted to his victim; but amused her, when she besought him to heal her wounded honour by the words of the holy mass of marriage, with idle excuses; and so she was put off from day to day, till she found there was life within her bosom, and that she was about to become a wedless mother.

"Gradually he got to neglect her, and daily grew more and more estranged from her; and at length, heading a secret conspiracy, his tower became the rendezvous of insurgent leaders, and day and night rung with bacchanalian revels. Lonely she sat, evening after evening, in her solitary chamber, with her face resting on her hand, and her eyes looking south over the sea; her thoughts winging their way to her lowly cot and its humble occupant, who, perhaps, mourned his daughter as having perished in the deep.

"At length she became a mother. *He* was away at the time, at the head of a party of conspirators bound on an expedition of treason and bloodshed. On the third day afterward he returned. She heard the tramp of horses, and with hurried joy opening the lattice—for, notwithstanding his neglect, she loved him still—saw him riding rapidly towards the tower, followed only by a single rider, and leading by the rein a palfrey, on which was mounted a beautiful lady; she saw that her head drooped, that she appeared sick and faint, and that he supported her by passing one arm about her waist. A pang of jealousy, the first she had ever

known, shot through her bosom. They reined up beneath the window: she saw him take her in his arms from the saddle, and bear her within the tower. Then, with surprise, she heard him, in a loud tone, give commands for all the defences of the castle to be put up, as if he expected to encounter a siege. She returned again to her couch faint and sick at heart, and waited his appearance. An hour elapsed ere he came, and painful were the thoughts that agitated her bosom. When at length she heard his footsteps, she rose to meet him with a smile of love, with her infant extended in her arms. His dress was disordered and bloody, as if he was just from conflict; and she at once saw, for affection is quick and suspicious ever, that his brow was dark and angry.

"'Ha!' he cried, scornfully, 'what have we here?'

"'The pledge of your former love,' she said, with gentle reproof, offering it to his arms.

"'By the head of St. Peter!' he exclaimed, pushing her rudely away, and fixing upon her a terrible look (which but one other living can give," said Elpsy, with peculiar emphasis, fixing her gaze upon Lester), "'I brought thee not hither to breed brats! Fling it from the window!'

"And, without deigning to cast a glance upon it, he strode across the chamber, while, with a cry of pain and mortal anguish, she sunk down upon the floor. He turned and looked back at her for a few seconds, and then said fiercely,

"'Rise, woman! I have brought a lady hither who will need thy services ere the dawn. Up, I say. Thou shalt be her servant if I bid thee. Such a station will best suit thy birth. Up, or I will tear thy brat from thee and cast it from the balcony.'

"She clung convulsively to her babe and rose from the ground. But was she not changed in that little while, Robert More? Was not her deep love turned into deep hate? Ay! as if by the wave of a wand her soul was changed, and she became a different being. 'Tis but a step from the deepest love to the deepest hate in woman's heart, when she feels that she is deliberately injured. Then lightning is not quicker than the change—hell not deeper than her hate! She rose from the floor another creature. He saw the alteration in her countenance, and, for a moment, his guilty spirit cowered. But Satan helped him to banish all feeling from his breast, and he waved her sternly away.

"'Whither?' she asked, meeting his fierce gaze with a cool glance of contempt.

"'To the chamber opening from the hall,' he said, in a tone of less authority, dropping his eyes before her steady look.

"As he went out he muttered to himself, but the mother's open ears caught the meaning of the words,

"'That child shall die!'

"She shuddered, but spoke not: clasping her child to her bosom after he had left her, she tottered from the room and descended to the hall. Entering the apartment designated, she there beheld the lady whom she had seen ride up to the tower. She was reclining on a couch, and appeared to be overpowered by fatigue and grief. She was very lovely, with fine dark eyes that were filled with tears, and raven hair that was spread dishevelled over her pillow. She turned her face as the door opened, and her countenance brightened with hope as she saw the approach of one of her own sex. The young mother advanced to the couch and offered her consolation. The lady glanced at the swaddled infant, and asked if she were the wife of 'Hurtel of the Red-Hand.'

"'No,' was the sad, yet stern, reply.

"The lady ceased to inquire further, and, being in her turn asked how she came there, said that she was a noble lady and a wife."

"A noble lady!" repeated Lester, with interest.

"Now that there is high blood spoken of, you can feel an interest in my story," she said, sarcastically. "Listen! She told how her lord had gone that morning at the head of a party of gentlemen to attack a strong position of the insurgents, when, anxious and impatient for intelligence, she rode out, accompanied by several servants, nearly a league from her castle, in hopes of meeting him or a messenger. She got no tidings of him, and was on her return, when one overtook her with a message from her lord, saying that he had gained a signal victory over the conspirators, who were totally routed with great slaughter, and that their chief, Hurtel of the Red-Hand, had barely escaped with his life."

"A battle with conspirators, and defeat of Hurtel of the Red-Hand. By Heaven! woman, my father once fought and conquered this same chief! Ha—your looks! what—speak—was it—was she—no—go on, it cannot be!"

The sorceress smiled mysteriously and continued,

"'I had hardly received this joyful news,' she said, 'when three horsemen, riding at full speed, came spurring behind us. They were passing us, when one of them, whom I recognised as Hurtel of the Red-Hand, turned in his saddle as he dashed by, and, looking at me earnestly, exclaimed,

"'"The countess, by all that's fortunate! This will help redeem the day's reverses, and give me a chance for my head!"

"'As he spoke he threw himself, with his company, sword in hand, upon my servants, and, after

a brief struggle, in which he lost one of his party, either slew or dispersed them; and then, ere I had time to collect my thoughts, he seized the rein of my palfrey and conveyed me hither. His object must be either ransom, or, more probably, the hope of being able, with me in his power, to make his own terms with the victorious party, of which my noble lord is captain. You, who have so recently become a mother, will sympathize with me at this crisis.'

"I will briefly pass over the events that followed," continued Elpsy. "Before dawn the Lady Lester was prematurely delivered of a male child; a fine, black-eyed boy, healthy and robust; but, through weakness and mental anxiety, she soon after became insensible, and neither caressed nor opened her eyes to look upon it. At sunrise the insurgent chief entered the chamber, and demanded which was the fisher's brat. There was an expression upon his face and a dark look in his eye that boded ill. With a convulsive shudder the mother shrunk from his gaze and flew to the bed, on the foot of which slept the two infants. She was just about to clasp her own to her heart, with the resolution to defend it with her life, when suddenly she checked the maternal impulse, and, turning to him, said, as if her conduct would depend upon his reply,

"'What would you do with it?'

"'Give it me!' he demanded, more fiercely, 'or I will slay both thee and thy young one.'

"And he approached her menacingly as he spoke.

"She once more bent over the babes! She dared not disobey: yet a mother's love called loudly at her heart. Her babe's life was all in all to her. It must be saved! She thought only of saving it!

"'I wait!' he said, sternly.

"Instinctively she caught up the babe of the noble lady and placed it in his arms.

"'Tis here! But spare, oh, spare it!' she cried, as he strode from the chamber with it in his rude grasp.

"Her heart smote her for what she had done. Leaving behind her her own babe, which she had saved by this maternal deception, she followed, clinging to him, and entreating him to spare the innocent. He heeded her not, but advanced rapidly to a balcony that overhung the water thirty feet above it, and, heedless of her cries, cast it over. She sprang forward, and saw that the swaddling robe in which it was wrapped had caught the point of a sharp rock, and that it hung suspended by it within a foot of the water. With a cry of joy she had nearly sprung off to save the babe, when, seeing that, by a bold leap from the balustrade, she could reach a projecting rock, from which she could clamber down to the water, she prepared to take it. But her exclamation caused him to turn back; and seeing the fall of the child had been so singularly arrested, and that she was about to attempt its rescue, he grew black with rage, and with a violent blow, as she was in the act of springing to the rock, struck her from the balcony into the sea. As she fell she caught by the edges of the cliff, and, in some degree, broke her fall, but, nevertheless, descended heavily into the water. It was not deep, and she recovered her feet, caught the babe in her arms, and, staggering to a sandy part of the shore, sunk down insensible. When she recovered her senses the sun was high in the heavens. She attempted to rise, but found she was deeply bruised, and that her spine was much injured by striking against the rock in her descent. She looked up to the balcony. It was closed, and

all was silent. It was evident that the murderer, supposing the fall fatal, had not the courage to watch her descent, and had retired.

"She immediately resolved not to enter the castle again. With her soul turned to bitterness, burning with vengeance against the author of her wrongs, and suffering with pain, she prepared to seek, with the infant she held in her arms, her father's cot. For her own babe she had no fears. She knew that it would ever be regarded as that to which the lady had given birth. It was fifteen miles to her native hut; yet weary, suffering, ill, she dragged herself thither by the evening of the second day. Her father, who had long mourned her dead, met her with open arms. He pitied and nursed her for many long months till she recovered her health; but her beauty of form was gone for ever. Her soul grew dark with her woes; vengeance took the place of love in her heart towards him who had so basely wronged her; and bitterness against all her species rankled in her breast, and hourly grew deeper and deeper. Her senses at length became unsteady. She grew restless and moody, and, after two years abode with her father, she wandered forth, leaving with him the boy, and never more returned to her natal roof. She sought a wild home in the vicinity of her own son, where she could daily see him, watch with pride his growth, and even speak with him unknown and unsuspected. But when, as he increased in years and stature, he began to look like his father, she began to hate him too, though, alas! it cost her many a pang to do so.

"She now learned, that on the evening of the day on which she had been hurled from the balcony, the husband of the lady, followed by fifty armed men, surrounded the tower and demanded her sur-

render of her captor. He replied that he would give her up on two conditions: first, that his lands should not be confiscated: secondly, that he should be permitted to ride forth, wherever he would, unmolested; which terms the noble lord promised should be complied with if his lady should say she had received no insult at his hands; and if, further, he would bind himself to quit the realm within nine days thereafter. To this he assented. The gates were shortly after thrown open, and, mounted on the blood-bay charger which he always rode, he paced forth from his stronghold, passed slowly and sternly through the lines of besiegers, and, after trotting deliberately till he had got a great ways beyond them, put spurs to his horse and rode off, no man knew whither: though there is *one* knows," she added, mysteriously, as if alluding to herself, "that within nine days he was on the sea, bound to the New World.

"The noble lord took possession of the tower, and joyfully embraced his lady, and thanked her, saying, that 'notwithstanding she had been a prisoner, she had not forgotten to make him a father;' and he took up and kissed the babe as if it had been his own flesh and blood, instead of sharing the mingled current that flowed in the veins of Hurtel of the Red-Hand and the fisher's daughter; and from thenceforward he took him home and made him the heir of his house. A little after that this brave lord fell in the wars, nor ever knew he the truth to his last dying breath. Thus ends my story, *Lord Robert of Lester!* Who, think you, was this noble lord and lady?"

The young man had listened to the latter part of her narration with thrilling attention. As she was drawing to the conclusion, he sprang from his feet, and laid a hand on either shoulder of the narrator,

and looked steadily into her eyes, as if he would read there the dreadful secret he anticipated, yet dared not meet. He listened to each word that fell from her lips with the most absorbing and painful interest—his lips parted—his eyes starting from their sockets—his face convulsed, and brought close to hers—his fingers almost buried in the flesh of her shoulders! When, at the conclusion, she put the sarcastic question to him, which he trembled lest he could too well answer, his hands stole from her shoulders and suddenly fastened upon her throat.

"Woman! sorceress! die!" he hoarsely whispered, through his clinched teeth, with terrible energy.

She freed herself from his grasp with an extraordinary effort, and flung him from her, laughing loudly and wildly!

"Ha, ha, ha! *Robert of Lester!* Does my story please thee, my *lord! my* retainers! my *domains!*"

He looked at her for a moment with appalling calmness, and then, approaching her, said, in an even tone, but in a hollow voice that was horrible to hear,

"Woman or demon, tell me truly, who was this noble lady who gave birth to a son?"

"Elizabeth of Lester, the 'Dark Lady of the Rock,'" was the firm reply.

"Was this change of infants surely made?" he asked, in the same tone.

"I have said it."

"And what became of her child?"

"'Twas left with the fisherman."

"Does he now live?" he asked, with sudden interest.

"He does!"

"As a fisher's lad?"

"He follows the craft of him who reared him."

"On the beach beneath Castle Cor?"

"You have said."

A strange expression, too complicated to analyze, passed across his features. But he continued with the same awful calmness:

"The woman—the daughter—what became of her?"

"Thou wilt know hereafter."

"And her own boy—ha! *was* it a *boy?*" he asked, suddenly.

"It was."

"He was taken home by my—by—Lord Lester?"

"Yes."

"Have they had no children since, woman?"

"None, ever, save him who was born beneath the roof of 'Hurtel of the Red-Hand.'"

"And this infant—this bastard child—this low-born boy, grew up within the halls of Castle More as its liege lord?"

"He did!"

"And that boy stands before you?"

"He does!"

His calmness was appalling to witness. She shrunk from looking him in the face, and cowered before the light of his eyes.

"Mysterious woman! how thou camest by the knowledge of these things I know not. I believe thou hast spoken truth; thy tale hangs too well together for malice to invent."

He struggled with strong emotion. His brow darkened, his face worked convulsively. At last he seemed to have resolved on a settled purpose.

"Who knows this hellish secret besides thyself?" he asked, his penetrating glance resting on her face.

"None but thee," she said, meeting his eye with a wary look, as if anticipating danger from the tone of his voice.

"To every human eye, then, but *thine*, I am Lord of Lester?"

"Who of mortal mould should suspect thee to be other than he, when she who bore thee not believes thee to be the fruit of her womb."

"Thou wilt swear this?"

"I say it."

"'Tis enough. Does this fisher's boy know the secret of his birth?"

"No!"

"Does the old man?"

"No!"

"Thou wilt swear it?"

"I say it."

"'Tis well, woman! Thou shalt die!"

As he spoke he drew from his breast his hunting knife and sprang upon her. She detected the momentary lighting up of his eye ere he made the spring, and alertly avoided the blow by leaping through the door: he fell forward, and the blade shivered against the stone sides of the tower.

With a laugh of derision she fled along the passage pursued by him. Her voice and also her footsteps ceased as he reached the steps leading upward from the tomb, and, without any sound to guide him, he groped his way along the gallery. At length he approached the light; but, although he could see through the door out into the forest, she was nowhere visible! After vainly searching every part of the ruin, he abandoned the attempt, remounted his horse, and spurred towards Castle More.

CHAPTER V.

"Oh God! how changed my nature with all this!
I, that had been all love and tenderness—
The truest and most gentle heart till now
That ever beat—grew suddenly a devil!"
Lord Ivan and his Daughter.

What pen can portray, what language describe the feelings of the haughty Lester, as he rode at furious speed towards Castle More? He could neither think nor reflect! His thoughts were confused and tempestuous. He could not realize that he had actually listened to the accursed tale with his own ears. He felt rather as if he had passed through some dreadful dream, and the idea flashed on his mind that she had thrown a dark spell upon his senses, and that the whole was an illusion, and altogether the result of her art.

By degrees his thoughts became more settled and run in a direct channel. He checked his headlong speed and began to reflect: to recall, word by word, the narrative of Elpsy; weigh each sentence; match fact with fact; each circumstance with its fellow; and trace the unbroken thread to the last damning proof. The result was irresistible. A thousand circumstances to corroborate the tale of infamy rose like phantoms to his shrinking memory.

He remembered how, in childhood, a neighbouring baron, who had been out against the insurgents, playfully laid his hand upon his head, and told him he looked so much like Hurtel of the Red-Hand that he must take good care, when he became a

man, he did not lose his head for the likeness: he remembered, too, how his childish spirit took fire at the similitude, and that he resented the insult with a blow! He further called to mind how, later in life, the more aged country people, in passing him, would shake their heads significantly; and often the whispered words, "Hurtel of the Red-Hand," would reach his ears. He recollected, also, how Lady Lester (alas! no longer, if this tale were proved true, to be regarded as his mother, yet whom he had loved hitherto with the intensest filial affection) had reproved him in his angry moods, and forbade him to frown so like Hurtel of the Red-Hand. He called to mind, too, how that, in childhood (unthought of again till too faithful memory brought it back), it had more than once reached his ears through the menials, that Lady Lester, in her youthful days, had been made a prisoner in some old castle by a rebel chief; and he could remember he had listened with childish interest to its recital as to a tale of enchanted castles and cruel giants. *Now* he could invest it with a too vivid reality! He had heard, also, he knew not how, and what, at the time, left no distinct impression on his mind, a scandal which said that Lady Lester did penance for unfaithfulness in her early marriage days: this cottage gossip he could now easily trace to her imprisonment by—could he speak it?—*his father!* He, too, had been twice called by spirited peasants, who, on certain occasions, had resented his arbitrary will—a *bastard!*

All these things rushed to his mind. There was something in it beyond mere idle gossip—something independent of mere accident! The tale he had listened to was to him a key to the whole. The inference was overpowering! It was as plain to his mind as the noonday sun, that the story he

had heard from the lips of Elpsy was founded in truth.

"'Tis true! 'tis *true!* 'tis TRUE!" he groaned, covering his face with his hands.

Oh, was not this an appalling and harrowing reflection for a proud spirit like his? Was it not a bitter, bitter cup that was presented to his lips? Alas, how cruelly barbed and how skilfully directed—how fatally sent, was the shaft of inexorable fate! It pierced the spot where alone it could penetrate; where its wound would be deepest, and the smart the keenest. Struck down from its high seat to the very ground was that pride of birth which constituted the basis of his character; and withered, dead, bruised in the dust lay the haughtiness of spirit, which, springing from that soil, had flourished like the green bay-tree.

"Not only lowborn—I could bear that, I could bear that! but, oh God! a *bastard!* Mercy! mercy! mercy!"

He hid his face as he gave utterance to these words, and sobbed audibly. He gave way for a few moments to the full tide of his strong and afflicting grief in the most agonizing manner! His soul was rent! his heart was broken! and, altogether, he presented a picture of moral desolation and mental wretchedness that was appalling to contemplate. What thoughts must then have passed through his mind and wrung his proud soul! The reflection that he must abandon all his plans and hopes as Lord of Lester; take leave of the luxuries to which he had been accustomed; descend from the rank of a noble to that of a peasant; be called "fellow" by the lowest hind; bear the scorn of the highborn and the jeers of the low; and, most of all, that he must for ever abandon, without hope, the love of Kate Bellamont, filled him with wo such as the heart of man hath seldom known.

"And need I forfeit all these?" he exclaimed, suddenly checking the current of his grief, his features lighting up at the same time with guilty exultation, and assuming an expression of deep determination; "need I make this sacrifice? May I not still be Lord of Lester?" he cried, rising in his stirrups and almost shouting with the force of his thoughts. "Ay, and *will I!* Ay, and *will I!* 'Tis but to silence, either with gold or true steel, this beldame, who is the sole depositary of the secret of my birth!"

For a moment after giving utterance to this guilty idea he rode silently along; his honourable nature and his inflexible pride both having instantly risen at the criminal suggestion, and revolted at a deception so vast. But there were two strong motives which threatened to weigh down these better promptings, though honour pointed to the course he should alone pursue. He could not bear—his proud spirit could never brook, that the despised fisher's lad—the humble, low-nurtured peasant—for such he was, notwithstanding his noble birth, should stand in his place, and *he* himself—oh, it was madness to think of it—sink into the fisher's boy!

"No! perish honour—perish truth—perish all that is noble or virtuous in my nature first!" he cried, with the reckless decision of one who has resolved to sustain wrong at the expense of right.

There was a second motive, the love of Kate Bellamont! Should he resign her for ever? Could he endure the scornful disdain with which he believed she would regard him? Above all, could he bear to have the handsome fisher's lad, whom he already looked upon, in some sort, in the light of a rival, sue successfully as Lord of Lester for her hand? Could he endure all this and be human? Could he resign all to become what he dared not contemplate, and live?

"No!" he cried, vehemently, "away with all justice and truth! let my heart be wrapped in a mesh of falsehoods first! But need there be falsehood? Silence, *silence* will effect it. Is there injustice when the victim is ignorant of his rights?" he asked, mentally, as if he were arguing with his own soul. "Yes, most foul! and silence will be a living tongue to torture me—a never-ending falsehood to degrade—and will cast over the soul a night that can never know a dawn! Shall I incur this load of guilt? Will what I gain by the purchase repay me for the sacrifice of truth and honesty? Shall I not even be happier, ay, and more noble, as the poor fisher's lad, having done justice, than as Lord of Lester and Castle More, convicted at my soul's tribunal of guilt, and knowing who and what I am?"

Such was the train of reasoning that insensibly passed through his mind, and to which he gave utterance at this extraordinary crisis of his fate, and which promised to overthrow his former criminal resolutions.

"But should I do as my better nature prompts," he continued, after galloping forward a few moments, reining up and pursuing his former train of reasoning, "I need not be compelled to take the place of this Lester in his fishing hut, nor need I to remain within the atmosphere of Castle More, to meet the scorn of the noble, the insults of the lowborn. The world is all before me; I have a ready spirit, and a hand to sustain it, and can carve my own way through it; and with honour, too! Ay, I may yet win a name with the noblest born!"

Suddenly in the midst of this expression of his laudable and honourable purpose he stopped; a gleam of terrible fire shot from his eyes, while his face glowed with crimson shame.

"Ha, ha, ha! *honour!* Ha, ha, ha! a *name!* I had forgot," he repeated, with an accent bitter, sarcastic, and scornful beyond expression, yet with a wretched look of hopeless despair and misery; "what has a bastard to do with *honour?* What is it to him? I had forgotten I was more than lowborn! I'faith, 'twas well thought of! So all my lofty feelings go for nothing." His manner now changed, and his voice rang with passion. "What have *I* to do with lofty aspirations, with honour, or a name among men? Am I not branded with infamy? infamous by birth; attainted by my father's —yes, for I will acknowledge him—*my father's* blood! base through my mother's! What have I to do with honour? 'Tis not for me. I know it not. Henceforward I will forget its sound and meaning. What have I to do with honour? Ha, ha, ha! A name? Yes, I will win a *name;* I will show myself the true son of Hurtel of the Red-Hand. He shall not be ashamed of his blood. No, no! I will win a name that, be he on earth or in hell, shall make him smile and own me as bone of his bone and flesh of his flesh."

The scornful energy, fierceness of spirit, and stern determination with which this guilty resolution was spoken, showed that at a single blow was crushed all pride of character; that the highborn loftiness of spirit in which he had been educated had fallen, and that honour was for ever shipwrecked. He felt himself, in anticipation, already an outcast from the world; a shunned and despised alien; an object of the scorn and pity of mankind. And such he was. He felt it to his heart's core. Eventually, perhaps, he might have forgiven the lowness of his birth, and risen superior to this contingency; but he could not forget its illegitimacy. What had a bastard to do among men! What had

he to do with the love of highborn maidens? What was to him the luxuries, the pleasures, the social joys of life? Nothing. The honours of earth were not for him; "a bastard shall not enter even into the kingdom of heaven." Who, then, shall condemn the resolution of a proud youth like Lester, without due cultivation of the moral sense; unrestrained by religious principle, and thinking, feeling only as a man? Who shall judge and not pity? Who shall censure and not sympathize with him in his terrible human trial, and regard with charity even the darkest aberrations from morality and virtue to which it might lead him; remembering that he had the moral heroism and godlike virtue to resolve to become his own executioner; the voluntary herald of the sentence that should cut him off from rank, title, wealth, yea, love, and brand him as an exile from his species?

Notwithstanding the array of proofs to substantiate the narrative of Elpsy; notwithstanding the irresistible connexion existing in his own mind in support of its truth, yet there lingered in his heart a faint hope that it might not be as he believed. It became so dreadful when calmly contemplated, that he began to conceive that it was impossible for it to be true. There was but one way of confirming it, viz., to confront Lady Lester, and learn from her lips the truth of what Elpsy had related in reference to herself. If it should prove correct, then he resolved finally to decide on the method he should pursue. Gathering up the reins and pressing his armed heels into his horse's flanks as he came to this determination, he said, as he dashed forward to Castle More, the towers of which were now full in sight,

"From her lips—Lady Lester's (if I may not call her mother), will I have corroboration of this foul witch's words. Fly, my good horse; we will

soon learn whether thou and I are to part! But, if it must be so, no other shall back thee after me, my faithful animal; my own hand shall slay thee first!"

The fleet hunter brought him in a few moments to the gate that led into the courtyard surrounding Castle More. At the sound of his approach it flew wide open, and, as he passed through, the porter removed his cap and bent low with servile respect.

"Ay," he muttered, "'tis so *now!* but he will be the first to scoff with a high head, and turn the key upon my back, when it shall be noised abroad that Robert of Lester is the brat of a peasant—the left-handed offspring of Hurtel of the Red-Hand!"

He threw himself from his horse, and cast his bridle to his groom, giving him orders to hold him in readiness for him to remount at any moment, and entered beneath the lofty arch of the castle, over which were elaborately sculptured in stone the ancient arms of Lester. He rapidly mounted the spacious stairs to a large and lofty hall, hung with armour, and adorned with figures of mailed warriors, ancestors of that warlike house. From childhood he had looked upon these with awe and pride. Now he curled his lip with haughty despair, and strode past them with a bitter smile. At its farther extremity he tapped lightly at a door, partly concealed by tapestry of velvet fringed with gold, and adorned with needlework representing figures and scenes of a scriptural character. He was commanded to enter. With a beating heart, and choking with the anticipated confirmation of what left scarce room for a doubt, and which he had already begun to contemplate as if there were *no* question of its truth, he obeyed.

The room into which he was admitted occupied a small octagonal wing of the building, and from its

single Gothic window commanded a prospect of the mere below, the distant forest, and a blue, wavy line of hills skirting the northern horizon. It appeared to be used partly as a boudoir and library, partly as a chapel: a small altar; a marble font containing water; a crucifix at one end, with two lighted wax tapers burning before it, appertaining to it in its more sacred character. It was hung with brown silk tapestry, on which was worked, in yellow silk, the history of the martyrdoms of the apostles. Immediately about the altar the hangings were of black velvet, giving that part of the room a religious and gloomy character. A rich, but soft, light poured in through the stained glass of the window, and shed a pleasing glow over all.

Near the window, working with her needle flowers of gold on an altar-piece of snow white satin, sat the mistress of Castle More—"the Dark Lady of the Rock!" She was of a tall and stately figure, with an innate air of high birth and breeding: her features were strikingly noble, and still bore traces of eminent beauty. Her eyes were black and piercing; and her brows very dark and thick, yet not masculine, but giving rather softness and intellect to the expression of the eyes. Her hair was jet black, and confined beneath a close nun's cap, and her complexion was deep brown, which, with the general dark tinge of her face and features, had got for her from the peasants the appellation by which among them she was more commonly designated. The lustre of her fine eyes had given place to a melancholy hue; and the smile, which in youth had fascinated the gallant Lord of Lester, was sad and pensive. Calmness, gentle resignation, and devotion were now the characteristics of her countenance. She was evidently one who regarded this world as the path to that of a happier, and looked

to that happier for the enjoyment which, without her deceased lord, she could not find in this. Twelve years had passed since the news was brought her that he had fallen before the walls of Saragossa, breathing her name in his last sigh. From that hour she seldom had been seen to smile; but, shunning all intercourse with those around her, she communed only with her priest and her God.

"I thought I knew the footfall of your horse, Robert, but did not expect you so soon," she said, in a quiet, subdued tone; "there is a quarter of an hour yet to sunset, and you seldom return from Castle Cor till it is very late. And Kate's birthday, too! How is this?"

She knotted her thread as she spoke, and looked up, showing a countenance chastened by widowed sorrow, and wearing, as she gazed upon him, a kindly look, rather than a smile, of welcome. The troubled expression of his features; his flushed brow; his excited manner, and nervous tread as he crossed the floor to the window, struck her with surprise and alarm.

"What has happened, Robert? your feelings are wounded, I fear. Come and tell me what that saucy maiden, Kate Bellamont, has been saying to give you such uneasiness."

This was spoken with maternal affection, and an approach to playfulness of manner.

The young man stood by the window and gazed down into the placid mere, fixing his eyes vacantly on a fleet of stately swans that sailed on its glassy breast, and remained silent. He knew not how to commence the subject—he knew not what to say!

"Robert, my son," she said, affectionately attempting to take his hand, "something has gone

wrong with you to-day; make a confidant of your mother!"

"Would to God thou *wert my mother!*" he cried, almost suffocating.

"Thy mother, Robert! what do these words mean?"

"That my future happiness and misery depend on your lips," he replied, turning towards her and grasping her hands with strong emotion.

"Explain!" she said, alarmed and deeply moved by the distress and earnestness of his manner.

"Did you ever—(sustain me, Heaven, at this moment," he gasped) "ever, face to face, meet Hurtel of the Red-Hand?"

"Robert, what motive, so terrible in its effect on your mind, can have led you to ask this?"

"Answer me, my mother—speak, Lady Lester!"

"Yes!" and she shuddered, as if some painful incident of the past seemed to press upon her memory.

"Where? Speak, and tell me truly, if you love me!" he eloquently entreated.

"Heaven and the blessed saints preserve you, my son! 'Tis a sad story! Why would you seek to know this now? Be calm; you are ill—very ill!"

"No, I am not. Answer me—*where?*"

"He took me prisoner, and bore me on horseback—"

"Whither?" he cried, impatiently interrupting her.

"To his tower."

"And, ere thy husband rescued thee, I was born there?"

"Yes. But how heard you this? I knew not that it was known to you, though I had no motive,

surely, in keeping the knowledge of it from you," she said, with surprise. "Is it this, then, that has so strangely excited you, my son?"

"Who attended on thee at that crisis?"

"Robert—boy!"

"Answer me, Lady Lester, I conjure thee! in the presence of this holy symbol of our religion!" he added, with stern solemnity, taking a small diamond crucifix from her worktable and holding it up before her.

"A pale young woman: I fear me, a leman of that evil man."

"Was she a mother?"

"Who has taught thee to put such questions as these, young man?" she said, with something of severity in her voice.

"Answer me, Lady Lester, I pray thee!"

"She had an infant of three days' old."

"Was it with her in thy room ere thou becamest a mother?"

"It was."

"Did you see it?"

"No; she kept it swathed up, as if from shame."

"Who first gave your infant to your arms?"

"No one. I had fainted, and, when I came to my senses, I found my babe lying on the bed beside me; and," added the lady, with a mother's light rekindling in her eyes, "with all a young mother's first love, I clasped it to my bosom."

"And this woman and her child?"

"I never saw them more. That day my noble lord rescued me; and after he had seen and kissed the babe, I remember he pleasantly said to those around, 'In losing one I have gained two.' My poor, departed Lester! Heaven be merciful to his soul!"

"And I am that babe?"

"Thou art, my son!" she said, affectionately.

"I am not!" he cried, fiercely.

"Not my son?"

"*Not thy son!*"

"What mean you, insolent boy?"

"In one word, I will tell thee. The guilty paramour of that woman having resolved to put out of the world the living witness of the wrong he had done her, threatened also her life when she refused to surrender it. Prompted by the instinct of maternal love to save it, she laid it, while thou wert in a state of insensibility, by thy side, and gave thine to him, palming it off as her own, which, by this stratagem, was saved—and still lives. *I am* HE!"

"Robert of Lester!" cried the lady, rising up and fixing her piercing eyes, bright with unwonted fire, upon his face, "mock me not; spare thy mother's heart!"

"Before God I speak truly. I am *not* thy son."

"Holy Virgin! Mercy, Heaven! mercy!" shrieked the lady, and fell nearly lifeless into his arms.

For a few seconds there was a deep silence, like that of death, throughout that little chamber. He had not anticipated this! Absorbed in the contemplation of his own misery, he had not thought of the blow he should inflict, by the disclosure of the dreadful secret, upon the mind of Lady Lester. It suddenly occurred to him that there was yet a balm in the existence of her true son which might heal the wound he had made. Filial affection caused him immediately to address, and, by touching this chord, endeavour to restore her once more to life and hope.

"Lady!" he said, in a hoarse tone, that—so deep were the feelings that governed it—startled even himself.

"Ha! Robert! my son!" she cried, standing up and looking wildly in his face; "what is this I have heard? Is it a dream—some terrific dream?"

"Thou hast not dreamed, lady," he said, sadly.

"No, I have not," she cried, with energy, and with the sudden return of all her faculties; "no, I have heard thy lips deny me. Thou hast said I am not thy mother—that thou art not my own child!"

"Do you remember the tale I have told you, lady?" he asked, calmly.

"Remember? each word is seared into my heart!"

"And do you believe me to be your son?"

"Believe? believe! I know not what to believe. What should I believe! I believe thou art my own boy—mine, mine, *mine!*"

As she spoke she threw her arms with frantic wildness about his neck, and hugged him convulsively to her bosom.

"Lady, 'tis vain to shut your eyes to the truth. I am not your son—but your son lives!"

"He does, he does live, and I clasp him to my heart," she cried, energetically, folding him closer to her bosom.

"Nay—"

"Nay—*nay*, but I *will* hold thee! they shall not tear thee from me! No, no! they must take my heart too, for its strings are bound all about thee, and thou art tied too long and too strong to it by the thousand chords of a mother's love to be parted from it now. Ha, ha! They shall not part us! Shall they, boy?"

He looked up into her face and saw that her mind wandered; that reason was falling from its throne!

"Mother!" he said, in tones of gentle persua-

sion: "mother!" and he affectionately kissed her cheeks; "mother!" he repeated a third time, in the most touching tones of filial love—"I am, I will be, your own dear son!"

The softer feelings of her soul came back; all the mother rushed from the heart to the eyes; and dissolved, melted by his appeal, she burst into tears, and wept freely and long upon his shoulder.

At length she became composed; when, embracing his opportunity, though he had been severely tempted in the interval to let it rest for ever, he spoke again with cautious delicacy upon the fatal subject. She listened in silence. She heard him with calmness as he went on and explained to her the successive steps by which the exchange was effected, and unfolded to her, link by link, the connected chain of the witch's narrative. He convinced her—not of its probability, but of its possibility. Collecting all her strength of mind, she tried to contemplate the subject with compo sure. She succeeded: weighed it well, in all its parts and bearings; nicely balanced each particle, and sifted each doubtful circumstance. Suddenly she turned to him, and said eagerly, and with an eye kindling with hope,

"It may not be so, Robert! She may, in the agitation of the moment, when both were swathed, have caught up her own child!"

"At such a moment, above all, would a mother know her own!" he said, firmly, but looking as if he would, if he dared, still cherish a hope.

"Yes, yes; and she must, too, have seen it afterward," she said, in a tone of deep despondency. "But who told thee this fatal tale?" she asked, quickly.

"Elpsy, the sorceress!"

"Ha!" exclaimed the lady, turning pale. "I

fear, then, it is too true! This fearful woman has knowledge of hidden and wondrous things through her unholy art. Oh, God! that she had used it to a better end! But, then, there may have been a mistake! Malice—her hatred of her species may have caused her to give the facts this frightful turn! Dreadful being! thus to loose, even by raising a doubt of thy birthright, my last hold on earthly happiness, and wreck all my hopes in thee. Her face ever has haunted me as if for evil! It seems to me as if I had seen it in the dreams of my childhood. I know not how it is, but I never looked upon her without presentiments of evil and vague sensations of suffering, as if her very presence was associated with scenes of terror. Now are they all, indeed, realized! But I will not give thee up, Robert, my son—my own son!" she cried, frantically! "I will cling to the hope that the fatal exchange was not made!"

He suffered her to embrace him again and again, and then, after a few moments' silence, and speaking in an indifferent tone, he said,

"Lady Lester! Was thy noble husband of fair complexion?"

"No, dark as the Spaniard's, yet it was exceedingly rich to the eye with its bright blood!" she said, with conjugal pride.

"Were his eyes blue?"

"Black as night, large and staglike, yet soft as a fawn's in the gentleness of their expression—but terrible as the eagle's when roused."

"Were his locks golden?"

"The plumage of the raven not more black and glossy!"

"Was he tall of stature and strongly-framed?"

"Scarce even as tall as thyself now; his frame was light and elegant, but manly: to sum him up

in all," she said, carried away by the prideful recollections awakened by these allusions to him, "he was a statesman; a patron of letters and the arts; a gallant knight, a brave soldier, and an accomplished scholar: he was called the handsomest man of his time: above all, he was a Christian!"

"*Am I like him?*" asked Lester, startling her with the depth of his voice, and at once showing her the drift of his seemingly aimless questions. "Is my stature slight? are these locks raven? are these eyes black? is the hue of the Spaniard on my cheek?"

The lady shrunk from his words, covered her face with her hands, and despairingly shook her head.

"Say," he added, with increasing energy, "is there the faintest lineament in my face—a scarce perceptible cast of the eye—a bend of the brow—a movement of the lip—a motion of arm or finger—aught in my carriage, walk, or voice, that reminds thee of thy noble husband?"

"No, no, no! Stop, stop, you will kill me!"

"One word more! Answer me truly, Lady Lester, as you stand before Heaven, have I not the same fair skin—the same light flowing hair—the same blue eyes—the stature, the very voice—ay, the very selfsame frown of Hurtel of the Red-Hand?"

"Ha! now I see it! Oh, Jesu Maria! Thou art his very image! Mercy, mercy, mercy!" and, with a shriek wrung from a breaking heart, she fell, as if dead, upon the floor.

For a few moments he stood gazing upon her with the cool, decisive smile of a man for whom fate has done her worst, and who defies and laughs to scorn her farther triumphs over his soul. His fixed countenance was more fearful than phrensied

agitation or tremendous wrath. It was the dark, still cloud that rests upon the crater ere the volcano bursts into flame. Gradually, as he gazed on that beloved countenance, pale and deathly in its aspect, he sunk on his knees beside her, took her insensible hands within his own, and kissed her unconscious brow, while fast and thick dropped the heavy tears upon her face.

"Mother, for mother thou art, indeed!" said he, feelingly, "I would not have struck this blow to thy heart; but I could not stand before thee a deceiver, an impostor! I could not encounter the affectionate glance of thy pure eyes, meet thy gaze of maternal love, and know they were not mine. Yet thou art my mother! all the mother I have ever known. Have I not drawn life from that breast? Has not my infant head been pillowed from the first on that maternal bosom? Didst thou not hear me when my infant lips first lisped thy maternal name? Hast thou ever known other son than me—I other parent? Thou *art* my mother! I *am* thy son, though the blood of strangers, whom I have never known, flows in my plebeian veins! Mother, we must part! The house of Lester may not have a baseborn lord! Would to God I could have turned aside this stroke from thee! But it is past! Henceforward thou art nothing to me—I nothing to thee. Farewell, farewell, my own, my beloved mother!"

He bent over her, and affectionately and passionately embraced her, pressing his lips to hers, and bathing her face with his hot tears. She seemed to be awakened to sudden consciousness by the act; and throwing her arms about him, she faintly articulated, "My son! my son!" and relapsed into insensibility. He clasped her unconscious form in one more long embrace, kissed her

for the last time, and gently disengaged himself from her arms.

His movements became now direct and decided. He approached the escritoir, and hastily wrote on a leaf of her missal,

"Lady Lester—nay, *mother—dearest* MOTHER! I have just taken my last leave of you. I go forth into the world and commit my fortune to its currents. Baseborn — guilty-born — attainted by my father's crimes, I am unworthy your love or a place in your thoughts. Henceforward let me be nothing to thee! Forget that I have ever existed. Though I depart, yet is Lester not without an heir! you not without a son! *Thy* child thou wilt find with the fisherman Meredith, at Castle Cor. He is the perfect semblance of thy husband, Robert, Lord of Lester, as you have described him to me; and, when your eyes behold him, your heart will at once claim him. He is proud and high-spirited, and worthy of the name he is destined to bear. Seek him out; and may he fill the place in your heart from which I am for ever excluded. Farewell, my mother, for other mother than thee have I never known—will never know!

"ROBERT,

"*Son of Hurtel of the Red-Hand.*"

He placed the paper open before the crucifix, where she was wont to pray, and was himself unconsciously in the act of kneeling to seek a blessing from Heaven, when he hastily recovered his erect attitude, saying, with a thrilling laugh of reckless hopelessness,

"Never more do I bend the knee to Heaven! What have I to do with prayer?"

He approached the door, and then turned back

to gaze an instant with a melancholy look on the prostrate form of Lady Lester:

"Nay, I must not leave thee so!" he said: returning, he tenderly raised her up, and used means to restore her.

After a few moments she revived and gazed wildly around her.

"Robert, is it you? are you beside me? Oh, my son, I have had *such* a tale of horror revealed to me as I slept."

She pressed her fingers upon her eyelids as if to recall what appeared to her a dark dream. As she did so he stole from her towards the door—lingered—turned back—severed a bright lock from his temples, pressed it to his lips, and placed it within her hand; he then hastily kissed her pale forehead, saying, half aloud,

"*Here I bury all human feelings!*"

The next moment he precipitately fled from the room.

Roused by the sound of the closing door, she shrieked his name, and, hastening through the dark hall, called in tones of distressing anguish,

"Robert, my son! my boy! my dear boy! leave not your mother desolate!"

He stopped his ears to the sounds, quickened his steps, and threw himself into his saddle.

"'Tis full late, my lord, to ride forth alone," said the groom, as he held the stirrup.

"Lord me not, Tyrell. If thou hast chanced to be born in wedlock, thou hast better blood in thy veins than I!"

"How mean you, my lord?" said the astonished menial.

"Didst ever hold stirrup for a fisher's son?"

"No, my lord!"

"Thou liest. For thou hast but now done so.

Your lord has found out that he is but a fisher-woman's brat; and a fisher's brat is about to find out that he is a lord."

"You speak in riddles, my lord."

"Set thy wits, and those of yonder gaping fellows, to work to unriddle them," was the reply of the degraded youth as he buried his spurs deep in his horse's flanks. "Give the compliments of the son of Hurtel of the Red-Hand to your new lord, knaves, and say he has taken the liberty to borrow his hunter for a time!" he cried, turning round in the saddle as he rode off.

The next moment he dashed across the drawbridge and disappeared in the twilight gloom of the forest, leaving the wonder-stricken retainers to pick the kernel from the difficult nut he had left them to crack; and, by putting their sage heads together, with the aid of some expressions dropped by the frantic Lady Lester, they were not long in arriving at a shrewd guess at the truth.

CHAPTER VI.

"Guiltless am I, but bear the penalty!"

* * * * * *

"Wild was the place, but wilder his despair:
Low shaggy rocks that o'er deep caverns scowl
Echo his groans: the tigress in her lair
Starts at the sound, and answers with a growl."

Zôphiël.

"Hurl'd
From the topmost height of his ambition,
It became his ambition to mate him
With the lowest."

THE night was fast approaching as the desolate outcast entered the forest. He hailed the gathering darkness with joy, for it was in unison with the

gloom of his soul. The howl of the wildest storm would have been music to his ears! He could have mocked with shouts of gladness the rattling thunder, and played with the shafts of the glittering lightning.

He rode deep into the wood—whither he cared not so that he left behind him all that he had lost. For half an hour he thought of nothing but urging his horse forward at the top of his speed. He banished thought, reflection, sensation. He dared not think. He found relief only in animal action and rapid motion, and rode furiously onward without knowing or regarding the course taken by his horse, who instinctively followed the dark windings of the forest paths.

At length the moon rose and shone down upon him through the tree tops. Its light seemed to restore him to himself. He checked his rapid course, and gazed at her pale orb; as he looked, reflection returned, and he began to realize his situation, and to taste the full bitterness of the cup of which he had drunken. The past, the present, the future, flashed with all their naked colours upon his mind. The picture his imagination painted with the hues they lent was too appalling to contemplate; and, as if the fabled influence of the planet, the soft light of which had restored him to reflection, had acted upon his fevered brain, he was suddenly converted into a maniac. He rose upright in his stirrups, and shouted, shrieked, till the forests rang again. He shook his clinched fists at the placid moon, that seemed smilingly to mock his woes. He spurred on his horse till the animal groaned with pain, and plunged madly forward with his phrensied rider! He would then rein him up, and, gnashing his teeth, lift his hands above his head, and curse God and man. Then he would

again shout with phrensy, and gore his steed till he became furious and snorted with rage, and ride once more forward with the speed of the wind.

These passions were too violent to last. His wild excitement gradually subsided; his horse was suffered to move at his own pace; and, with his arms folded moodily, and his chin drooping on his breast, he gave himself up to the stern and gloomy thoughts of his situation, and, for a time, buried in the depths of his own meditations, seemed to be wholly unconscious of external objects. He rode on in this way for more than an hour, when he was aroused by the sudden stopping of his horse. He looked up and saw before him a dilapidated gate, which barred his farther progress. Beyond, visible by the full flood of moonlight, was a lonely square tower, flanked by a single wing, topped with a battlement. He listened, and thought he heard the dashing of waves upon the beach. The whole scene was new to him! Where could his faithful steed have borne him? From the moment he had left Castle More behind all had seemed like a blank to him. How far, and whither, could he have ridden? He looked up at the moon. It had not risen when he left Castle More, yet it now rode high in the heavens! By her position it was near midnight.

Indifferent where he wandered, he leaped the sunken gate, and rode up to the tower. It was not in ruins, yet wore an aspect of desolation and neglect. Its loneliness harmonized with his own situation, and was grateful to him. He rode round the angle of a buttress, when the sea suddenly opened before him, and he saw that the tower stood on a rock thirty or forty feet above it, and that where it overhung the water projected a small balcony. A sudden thought flashed upon his mind as he discovered this.

"It must be!" he exclaimed, with animation; "'tis the tower of Hurtel of the Red-Hand! This moat, yonder ruined drawbridge, its situation, and, above all, that balcony, one and all, identify it with Elpsy's description. By the bones of my red-handed sire! thou knewest what thou wert about to bring me hither, sagacious animal!" he added, sarcastically, patting the noble horse on the neck; "'tis fitting I should take possession of my father's towers with the inheritance of his name. Ha, ha! I am not quite a vagabond!" and he laughed scornfully.

He started with surprise, for the laugh seemed to be echoed from the tower.

"'Twas a human voice, or else a spirit mocking! If demons do rejoice over the miseries of mankind, they may well hold a jubilee in honour of mine. Laugh on, imps! I am a fit subject for your merriment!" and he laughed with nervous derision.

Again he started, for he was answered by a laugh so wild that it chilled his blood. The sound seemed to proceed from an upper room in the wing of the building.

"Fiend or flesh, it shall rue this merriment!" he cried, leaping to the ground and hastening to the door of the tower.

It was ajar; he dashed it open with his heel, and found himself in a long, low hall, at the extremity of which was the window that opened on the balcony, through which he caught a glimpse of the glimmering sea. By the light it afforded he crossed the hall, and, standing on the balcony, glanced an instant over the vast moonlit expanse of water, and then, with a strange interest, the whole of Elpsy's story rushing vividly to his mind, he shudderingly cast his eyes down the rock which stood in deep shadow. Even by the indistinct light he could dis-

cern the sharp projection on which the garments of the infant had caught in its descent, and not four feet distant from him, on a level with the window, was the rock on which the fisher's daughter—*his mother*—was in the act of springing, when hurled into the sea by—*his father.* On that very balcony had he stood to do the deed! Strange, wonderful, overpowering were his sensations. He held his breath with the intensity of his thoughts.

"Here," said he, mentally, placing his hand on the balustrade, "has lain my unknown mother's hand; it warmed this senseless iron, which can give me back no warmth in return. Here pressed the foot of my father! Here they parted! How! ah, *how?* Where are they now? Where is he? does he live? Where is she? A fearful thought forces itself upon me that I dare not dwell upon! This strange tale of the sorceress; her wonderful and minute knowledge, that could be only known to the actor; her emotion at different portions of the story; a hundred things, light as air, that have insinuated themselves into my mind, have made me think she might be—fiends! it will out!—my mother! But, then, she told me that she was dead. Well, be it so, yet I can fall no lower! Were my mother living, could her lot be better than this fearful weird woman's? Ha, ha, ha! I have no pride now!" he added, with a hollow laugh of mingled despair and phrensy.

"Ha, ha, ha!" he heard repeated, in tones so unearthly that his heart ceased to beat, and a thrill like ice shot through his veins.

The next moment he was at the top of a flight of steps leading from one side of the hall to an upper room, from which the voice seemed to proceed. A stream of moonlight, falling through a window, showed him a door on the landing-place, which he

threw open. He found himself in a small room, lighted by a lattice of crimson-stained glass looking south towards the sea: into it the moon, in its western circle, had just began to shine, its red-died beams tinting the twilight of the chamber with the hue of blood. Seated high in the recess of the window, he discovered the dark figure of a female; her knees drawn up to her chin, and her hands clasped together around them. As he opened the door she leaped down like a cat and sprang towards him. The sanguinary light of the room had affected his imagination, not untinged with the superstitious fears of his time; but this sudden apparition, though he had prepared himself to see something either human or supernatural, caused him to start back with an exclamation of surprise.

"Come in, Robert of Lester! I welcome you to the room which first welcomed you to the light," said she, in a voice which he at once recognised as that of the sorceress.

The singular information her words conveyed suspended for the moment all other emotions in his mind save curiosity at finding himself so unexpectedly in the chamber where he was born. He gazed about him for a few moments under the influence of the strange thoughts and emotions the circumstance called up, and then turning towards her, said,

"Why art thou here, wicked woman? Didst thou anticipate my presence, and art thou come to mock the misery thou hast wrought?"

"I fled lest thou shouldst do a deed of blood thy hand might rue. I fled not for myself, but for thee."

"You need not fear me now. There exists no longer any motive for secrecy," he said, gloomily.

"How mean you?" she eagerly asked.

"Ere to-morrow's sun, 'twill be in every boor's mouth, from Castle Cor to Kinsale, that I am no longer Lord of Lester!"

"Speak—explain!" she said, hoarsely, grasping his arm with both hands, and breathing quick and hard.

"I have told the Lady Lester that he whom she thought her son was not her son," he firmly replied.

"Ha! *thou*—thou hast told thy shame? Speak, Robert More—have you breathed to mortal ear what I have told thee of thy birth?" she demanded, with fearful energy of speech and manner.

"I have. 'Tis known to every servitor from hall to stable!"

"Didst give thy name?"

"Robert, son of Hurtel of the Red-Hand."

"And this did thine own lips, of thine own free will?"

"Never man spoke freer!"

"Then hell be thy portion! Accursed be ye, Robert Hurtel! Had I thought thou wouldst have become the trumpeter of thy shame—had I believed thou wouldst have breathed to mortal ear thine infamy, I would have seared my tongue with hot iron ere I would have told thee the secret of thy birth. The infernal demon has prompted thee to do this! Didst thou not seek to slay me, that thou shouldst be the sole keeper of the foul secret?"

"I did, at the moment, but thought better of it!"

"Base! lowborn! miserable that thou art! Why was not my tongue withered ere I told thee this?"

"Would to God it had been, woman. What was thy motive in ever letting it go from thy own breast?"

"Love of mischief—hatred of mankind; and to lower thy pride, knowing from what dunghill thou wert sprung. But I did not think thou wouldst use my secret thus; and wreck the gifts that—that thy mother's stratagem had purchased, and after secured to thee by years of absence, privation, and misery."

"How?"

"Did she not, for thy sake, keep the secret of thy birth—coming not even near thee—when, on the ninth day, Hurtel of the Red-Hand being gone over the sea, she might safely have claimed thee of Lady Lester, and given her back her own!" she said, vehemently.

"Rather for her own sake—from maternal pride at having her son sit among nobles," was the stern reply. "And if these were her motives, as I doubt not they were, at what price did she purchase this honour for her child? The price of the deepest guilt, by keeping the true heir from his birthright. I did not view it in this light before. By the cross! I am a well-born! a guilty mother, too! 'Tis well you told me she was no more; I should care little to meet her in my present mood."

As he spoke, the woman sunk her head upon her bosom, and deep groans escaped her, whether of defeated hopes, of sorrow, of shame, or of remorse, he knew not. Suddenly he laid his hand upon her arm, and looked impressively in her face, and said,

"Woman! who is my mother?"

"Thou wilt never know!"

"Art *thou?*"

"Ha, ha, ha! *I?* Do I look like the gentle maiden that won the love of Hurtel of the Red-Hand? Are these matted locks tresses of gold? Is this complexion like the blended ivory and rose? Is my voice soft and full of love? Are my eyes

like the gazelle's, and gentle as the dove's in their expression? Is this hideous form such as would lure youth to embrace it? Wilt thou acknowledge thyself the son of 'the witch'—'the sorceress'—'the beldame Elpsy' (such were thy gentle terms)—the beleagued with demons—the familiar of the evil one—the—"

"No, no! Avaunt!" he shouted, with a furious gesture; "thank God! I am not sunk so low as that!"

"Ha, ha! Thy pride is fallen far indeed when it can enter thy thoughts, and even go from thy lips, that Elpsy of the Tower gave thee birth. Oh, ho! I am well avenged in this for thy mad folly in throwing away thy earldom. Oh, how I do hate thee for that act! for it thou shalt never know peace in body or soul!"

"I defy thee, woman, and all thy arts!"

"Yet the tales of my deeds have made thy human soul to shrink! Beware how thou speakest lightly of what thou knowest naught, and which is hid from mortal ken!" she added, with mysterious and solemn earnestness. "Whither turn thy footsteps now, Lord of Lester?" she asked, with chilling irony. "Doubtless thou hast come to take possession of thy fair lands here. They are not so broad, indeed, as the domains of Castle More, and thy castle needs some furnishing and repair. Doubtless thou wouldst like to fit it up ere thou bringest home to be its mistress the fair Kate of Bellamont!"

"Breathe that name again, woman, and I will take thy life!"

"Thou art now thy very father's image!" she said, with derision. "Even in this moonlight I can see that devilish shape of the eyes that his were wont to assume when he meditated murder! Ho! I dare to say thou wilt be like him in more than

the glance of the eye. Dost mean to follow in his footsteps, and head a band of lawless insurgents; or wilt thou, as 'tis said his brother did—"

"His brother?"

"Thou didst not know before thou hadst once an uncle? So: thou shalt no longer be kept in ignorance. He was a bold, bad man, and therein true to his race; was called Black Hurtel, and roved the Danish seas a daring bucanier. 'Twas said he could float his ship in the blood of the men he had slain! He was killed on the French coast in a fierce fight; but his vessel was captured, and his dead body, with his living crew (for the captors would not leave one alive to blacken the face of the earth), were sunk in the deep sea. Perhaps, like him, thou wilt take to the wave, and carve thy fortune in blood! Blood is sweet, and there is music to the ear in its gurgle where it is shed with a free hand! Look you," she said, pointing through the window; "the sea is spread wide before you, and seems to invite thee with its glancing waves. It knows not of thy disgrace, nor has it voices to whisper thy infamy; while every bird, tree, and stone will nod and gossip to one another as thou passest by—

"'There goes he who *was* the Lord of Lester!'"

"Woman, you madden me!"

"Perhaps," she continued, in the same cutting tone, while he paced the little chamber with a phrensied step, "thou wilt rather come and share my tower i'the ruin, if the new Lord of Lester will give thee leave; doubtless he will honour thee by asking thee to hold his stirrup on occasion. But, if thou wilt rather habit in this tower, I will be thy seneschal. I love its old gray walls! many is the moonlight night I've sat in the window and looked on the sea, as it danced, and glimmered, and

seemed to beck and nod, and laugh when I laughed. Ha, ha! I have had brave times here, gossipping with the sea!"

As she said this she looked from the window, and suddenly her eye seemed to be arrested by some unexpected sight. She gazed for a moment eagerly, and then said, in the enthusiastic tone and manner of a sibyl, skilfully assumed with the tact of one accustomed to turn to her own purpose every passing circumstance,

"Look thou, Robert Hurtel! I have had pity on thy state, and have, by the art thou hast dared to scorn, brought from many a far league away, to thy tower's foot, a ship to waft thee and thy fortunes! See how proudly it stands in towards the land, looking like a great white spirit, with the moon glancing on its canvass wings. Oh, 'tis a brave bark!"

The young man (her words taunting, malicious, and hateful as they were, not having been without some effect in influencing him in determining on his future course) sprang alertly to the window and gazed with interest on the approaching vessel. It was about a third of a mile from the land, standing directly towards the tower before a light breeze. It was apparently about seventy tons burden, short and heavily built, rising very high out of the water, with a very lofty stern. It had three masts, each consisting of one entire stick, tapering to a slender point, and terminated by a little triangular flag. On each mast was hoisted a huge, square lugger's sail, which, with a short jib, stretched from the head of the foremast to a stunted bowsprit, and a sort of trisail or spanker aft worked without a boom, was all the canvass she carried or that belonged to her peculiar class of craft.

He watched it with eager attention as it came

bounding landward, flinging the glittering spray from its round bows, its wet sides shining in the moonlight as if sheathed with plates of silver. A chaos of hopes, wishes, and conflicting resolutions agitated his mind as it approached: after a short struggle, he resolved to throw himself on board if her master would receive him, and depart with her wherever the winds should waft her. Having come to this determination, he watched her motions with additional interest; and when, after coming in so close to the shore that he could discern that her decks were crowded with men, she wore round and stood northward, his heart sank within him; and, dashing his hand through the crimson glass, he was about to hail, when Elpsy checked him:

"Hold! see you not they are only coming up to wind to lie to! Look! they are already swinging round their clumsy sails."

The vessel came up slowly and heavily to the wind, and, by means of her mainsail, lay as still as if at anchor. In a few moments afterward, as they eagerly watched, they saw a boat let down, and several men descend over the side into it. He uttered a joyful exclamation when he saw this movement; and, without reflecting upon the character of the vessel, or the object it could have in view in landing on so retired a coast at such a time, he only thought of it as a means of bearing him from the hateful shore, and perhaps opening for him some path to action and mental excitement.

"See that flash of light on her deck! There is another gleam!" exclaimed Elpsy.

"'Tis the glancing of the moonbeams on steel!" he replied, in a gratified tone.

"There is a sound a man should know!" she said again.

"'Tis the ringing of arms!" he replied, in the same animated manner.

"What think you they are, young man?" asked she, with a peculiar smile, laying her hand impressively on his arm.

"I know not, nor care, so I may cast my fortune with them!"

"Thou art, of a truth, thy father's son!"

"And, by the cross, he shall not be ashamed to own me!" he replied, in a desperate and determined tone.

"I will tell thee what they are—for I have passed my life by the seaside, and know the nature, and have learned to know the occupation and nation of each ship by its fashion, as I would tell a tradesman's by his garb."

"What, then, is the nation of this barque?"

"He is a Dane."

"Its nature?"

"To sail in shallow waters, and run before the wind."

"Its business on the sea?"

"To rob, pillage, and slay!"

"Ha, a bucanier?"

"A Dane."

"'Tis but another name for pirate in these waters. By the cross! when I saw the glitter of steel in the hands of its crew, I half guessed it."

"Wilt thou now link thy fate with theirs?"

"Am I not fit to be their comrade? Are they outcasts; what am I? Are they branded with shame; who am I? Has society cast them from its bosom; was I not born in bastardy? Am I not fallen lower than the lowest he among them who hath been born in wedlock? Why should I hesitate to mate with my fellows? What has the honourable world to invite me to? What if I could bury in oblivion from

the reach of my own thoughts the black stain upon my birth and hitherto noble name, and, under a new one, with a strong heart and virtuous resolves, throw myself into the arena of honourable contest, and should succeed in winning a name that men would do homage to—should I not wear it, feeling that a sword was suspended by a hair above my head ?"

"How mean you ?" she asked, struck with the impassioned and despairing tones of his voice.

"I mean that, if, after carrying the secret like a living serpent coiled in my heart for years, I should, without suspicion, chance to win a fair name, the time at length would come when some one, with a too faithful memory, would recognise the bastard Hurtel—the quondam Lester—in the successful adventurer; and then— No, no!" he said, bitterly, "no, no! It may not be! The presence of this ship points me to the course I should pursue. I obey the fate that has directed it hither!"

"Wilt thou become a pirate ?" she said, with a natural and feeling manner, as if prompted by some suddenly-awakened interest in him. "Yesterday Lord of Lester—to-day a pirate!"

"Yes."

"Curse the tongue that told thee of thy birth! But," she continued, muttering with her usual quick tones and nervousness of manner, "it was so pleasant to tell him, for his father's sake, he looked so like him! And then it was a pleasure to humble his pride, which he made even me the victim of: and so, as my master would have it, I could not, for the life o' me, longer help telling him the love-story I had kept so many years in my heart for him. Ho! ho! ha! ha! and a pleasant tale it was, too!" she added in that phrensied strain which seemed to be most natural to her.

While she was speaking the boat, which appeared to be full of men, put off from the vessel, and they could distinctly hear the command to "let fall," followed by the splash of the falling sweeps.

"Give way!" in a stern, deep tone, came directly afterward distinctly to their ears; and, shooting out from the vessel's side, the boat moved in towards the cliff.

As it neared the shore, one of the men stood up in the stern, and was heard to command them to cease pulling; and, for a few seconds afterward, he seemed to be reconnoitring the beach. Apparently satisfied with his scrutiny, he ordered them to give way again, steered directly to the foot of the tower, and skilfully run the boat alongside of the rock almost beneath the window.

"Now lay off an oar's length from the shore, and wait for me," said the one who had steered the boat, and who appeared to be the leader. "Be on the alert against surprise, though there's little fear of any one being within a league of the old tower. Carl, you and Evan take the coil of rigging and come with me."

As he spoke he leaped on the projection of the rock; then measuring the cliff with his eye, he placed his cutlass between his teeth and began to ascend. By the aid of numerous fissures and bold spurs jutting out from the sides he reached the top, closely followed by his men. Here he paused a moment, resting on his cutlass, and looked about him. He stood directly beneath the window from which Elpsy and the young man were looking, and was plainly visible to them. He was a short, stout-built man, with a ruddy complexion, browned by the winds and suns of every clime. His hair was gray, and hung in straight locks about his ears; and, judging by the deeply-indented lines of his weather-worn visage, his age was about fifty; yet his compactly-

built figure, his light motions, and athletic appearance, gave indications of many years less. His countenance, turned upward to their full gaze in his survey of the tower, wore an expression of careless jovialty, united with desperate hardihood. The most striking characteristic of his face was a thick red mustache covering his upper lip. He had on his head an immense fur cap, and wore a short, full frock of a dark shade, secured at the waist by a broad belt, stuck with large, heavy pistols of the kind known, at the period, as the hand-harquebuss. He wore, also, voluminous breeches of buff leather, buckled at the knee, red cloth gaiters, and high-quartered shoes with pointed toes, and garnished with sparkling buckles of immense size. By his side hung the empty sheath of the sabre on which he leaned. His men, save the fur cap, for which they substituted red woollen ones of a conical form, and the frock, instead of which they wore long jackets, were—breeches, buckler, shoes, and gaiters —his counterpart in apparel.

"'Tis the very spot I once knew it! The unchanged sea—the rock—this gray tower! It seems as if but a day, and not eighteen years, had passed since I banqueted here with Hurtel of the Red-Hand," he said to himself, gazing round with revived recollections at each object. "Well, strange things have happened since! He is dead, or an exile with a price on his head; all our brave band scattered; and I, only, am left to stand once more on this familiar spot. The old rookery looks desolate enough, and seems to sympathize with its master's fortunes! Open your lantern, Carl, and let us enter! This moon will scarce afford light where I wish to penetrate! Heaven grant no evil spirit haunts here to keep guard over the treasure I have come to carry off! But, if it still remains,

I will e'en cross blades with the devil for it, and win it, will he, nil he."

He passed as he spoke round the tower, and the next moment the listeners heard the heavy footsteps of the three men echoing through the hall. The young man was about to spring from the room to meet them, when Elpsy held him back.

"Would you run upon death! They would sheathe their cutlasses in your body ere you could open your lips. Hold, and hush! There is time enough. We will see what their purpose is. I have half a guess, from his words, at their business here."

"What!"

"Hurtel of the Red-Hand, the story goes, had secreted in some part of the tower large sums of silver and gold, with which to aid the conspiracy he headed. He had neither time nor means to take it away with him, and doubtless it still remains here, and this bucanier is acquainted with the secret."

"Ha!" he exclaimed, with surprise, "who told thee this?"

"Rumour, said I not!" she replied, after a moment's hesitation.

"And how should these know where to look for what has been concealed for years?"

"Hark!" she cried, as a heavy noise reached them from a distant part of the building, "they have opened the trap of the tower, and will descend into the vaults. He is one that knows well the place."

"Doubtless, from his language, some one of my hospitable parent's fellow-chiefs, who used to revel here in the days you tell of. I will see what they do, and take opportunity of forming good fellowship with my father's friend. Nay—but let me go, woman!"

He broke from her as she attempted to detain him, and, cautiously opening the door, descended with a cautious and rapid step into the hall. At its opposite extremity he saw, by the glimmer of a lamp held by one of them, the two men standing over an opening in the floor, and their leader just in the act of letting himself down into the subterranean chamber beneath.

"Hold the ladder steady, Evan!" he said. "Thrust your lantern down at arm's length, Carl, so that I can see where to place my foot. Ha! there, I find bottom," he added, his voice sounding hollow from the depth; "'tis dark and damp as a Calcutta blackhole! Faith, it's more like a tomb than an honest underground apartment. I hope I shall not see Hurtel's ghost guarding his box. Tumble down here, boys, and be ready to hand above decks as soon as I find out where it's stowed away!"

The others, leaving their cutlasses behind, followed him into the vault. Their heads had no sooner disappeared than the young man crossed the hall with a free step to the trapdoor, and looked fearlessly after them. He had from the first, when the vessel came in sight, deliberately resolved to attach himself to the party; and now the frank, blunt manner of the old sea-rover struck his fancy, and confirmed him in his resolution. But he was at a loss how to make his intentions known—how first to address men ready to shed blood on the instant without question, and among whom, at such a time, the very discovery of his presence might be fatal ere he could make known to the chief his intentions. While watching them as they groped about through the vast vault, an idea, characteristic of his now reckless disposition, suggested by the ghostly apprehensions of the

leader, entered his mind. He paused for an instant, and then, favoured by the darkness, dropped noiselessly into the chamber. With a step that gave back no sound, he approached them as they moved in an opposite direction from him, throwing the light all forward, and waited the opportunity he had chosen for discovering himself.

"'Tis twelve paces to the south, eight paces to the east, and six paces to the west again—which will bring me to the wall, and on the very stone Red Hurtel and I placed over the gold," said the captain; "here are twelve paces, well told!" he added, placing his foot immediately afterward emphatically on the stone floor.

These words at once gave the youth a key to the course he should adopt. His quick eye, as the leader turned to pace east, comprehended the remaining angle at a glance, and, gliding away by the wall, he moved cautiously and noiselessly along till he felt his foot press upon a loose slab. He knew he must be on or near the spot; and drawing himself to his full height, and unconsciously assuming a stern and resolute look, called up by the novelty and danger of his situation, he waited the angular advance of the captain, who, with his men, was too intent on accurately marking his steps to look up even for a moment.

"Now west!" said the leader; and, turning as he spoke, he had counted on to four, *five*, and was about to take the last step to the wall, when, pronounced in a deep tone, that rung hollow through the vault, he heard the word,

"Forbear!"

He lifted his eyes and fell back upon his men as the lantern shone full upon the object, exclaiming,

"The ghost of Hurtel, by all that's good! Evan, come back here, you villain! Carl, give me that

lantern, coward!" he shouted to his men, who turned and fled with affright.

He caught the light from the hand of the terrified Dane, and turned upon this apparition, which, notwithstanding his coolness, had not a little disconcerted him. He held the lamp, though standing off at a chosen distance, to the face of the supposed ghost, and said, with an odd mixture of natural boldness and superstitious fear,

"'Fore Heaven, comrade, you have grown full young in the other world! But there is no mistaking the cut of your eye. Faith, but you can smile, I see," he added, more freely. "There's no more mistaking your smile than your black, ugly frown! So, suppose we shake hands, and, after we get the chest aboard—for they say you don't want this sort of ballast in the seas down below—why, we'll empty a can together, and spin a yarn about old times before the cock crows!"

As the intrepid old sea-rover spoke, he extended his rough hand to grasp that of the other. The young man hesitated to take it, for he was scarce sure of his reception when it should be discovered that he was flesh and blood.

"Never mind if your fingers be a little cold or so, 'tis the nature o' ghosts. I can give you a grasp that'll put warmth into 'em, and last you till you get back where you hail from. Come, old friend, give us your digits, just to say you ain't offended at the liberty I am about to take with your chest o' sparklers; and afterward I will just thank you to step one side a bit!"

The young man smiled at the intrepidity of the seaman, and took the proffered hand.

"Warm! by the bones of St. Nick! The old fellow below has been keeping you over a hot fire, messmate. Well, you must confess, you lived a

wonderfully wicked life; and so, as the priests say, the devil will fry it out of you. Sorry for you, on my word! Will lay by fifty of these guilders in prayers for your soul! So take heart. Now just step aside off that slab, which you stick to as if 'twas a tombstone, and we'll bear a hand and bouse this old box out in the snapping of a bolt-rope."

"I am no spirit, but a habitant of this world, like thyself!" he said, with firmness, and a straightforward frankness that he wisely calculated would have its effect; "I am a young adventurer, without name or family, weal or wealth. I would take service with thee, and follow thy fortunes on the sea!"

The bucanier listened with surprise; and as he became convinced, from his words and manner, that he was no shade from the land of spirits, which shadowy beings he seemed to fear no more than mortal substance, his countenance instantly changed, and he surveyed him with a puzzled look of surprise and doubt.

"So! this alters the case! Who art thou, then? what art thou doing here—and on this particular stone? 'Tis mysterious, i'faith! Guarding this treasure, which no man save Hurtel and I saw laid here; so like him, and not be he! Yet thou canst not be Red Hurtel in the flesh, for his hair would be as gray as mine by this time. Thou sayest thou art not his spirit. Who, and what, then, in the name of St. Barnabas, may you be?"

"His son."

"Ha! ho! There it is, as plain as my hand!" he said, slapping the flat of his cutlass into his left palm. "Priest never had aught to do with thy begetting or thy christening, I'll be sworn! I now remember he had a leman-lady in the tower when I knew him. A proper youth," he added, looking at him with interest, "and as like your father as

one marlin-spike is like another! So you inherit the old tower, I dare say, and follow in his steps. St. Claus and the apostles! I would not be surprised if you laid claim to the gold here!"

"I care neither for tower nor gold, good captain. To follow your fortunes I alone ask."

"Do you know what fortunes I follow?" inquired the other, significantly.

"I care not, so there is work for the free hand and ready spirit."

"A chip of the old block! There's my hand to it. You shall have your will, my brave one! Your father and I were comrades in that cursed affair that made the country too hot to hold us. I have been a rover since, and, trusting to my gray head, have ventured back to carry off what gold I heard he had not time to remove. Thou shalt go with me for thy father's sake, boy."

He grasped the old man's offered hand, and, for the moment, felt that he was less alone in the world. What a change had one brief day made in the feelings and destinies of this haughty young man!

"Bear a hand, you pale runaways!" cried the captain to the men, who, seeing that their spirit had proved of flesh and blood, returned, scowling darkly on the cause of their discomfiture. "Take hold of the edge of that stone, and lift it from its bed. Place your hands on the right spot, and it will come up like a cork."

The men made several ineffectual efforts to lift it, though even assisted in their last attempt by their captain.

"How is this?" he said; "it should move with a finger's touch. Ha, I have it! I had forgot. You might heave till you were gray, boys, and it wouldn't stir a hair. Look at some of my magic."

He stooped as he spoke, and pressing the stone horizontally towards the wall, it moved from its bed, and slid away slowly, as if on wheels, beneath it exposing a cavity two feet square and about three feet deep, containing an oaken box, bound with strong bands of rusted steel.

"Here it lies, like a biscuit in a bucket! Let us see if the gold has got rusty."

He searched a few moments, and at length bore hard upon a corner of the box, but without producing any effect.

"The spring is as tight as if Old Nick had his foot on it. Let us try what this good steel, that has served me so often at a push, will do now."

He pressed the point of his cutlass with steady force against one corner, when suddenly the lid flew up, and a glittering pile of silver and gold, and a remarkably shaped dagger, a foot in length, wider at the point than the handle, and exceedingly rich with precious stones, met their eyes.

There was a general exclamation of surprise at this display of treasure. The young man took up the weapon and examined it with curiosity.

"That belonged to Hurtel of the Red-Hand, and he prized it, too!" said the old pirate. "It shall be thine, young man! Holding it with that grasp as you do, and your kindling eye, I would swear my old comrade stood before me. If nature put the father's looks on all children as she has on thee, it would be a blind father that wouldn't know his own child. But it's only bas—hoit! I mean to say that children honestly come by seldom show the breed they hail from as some other sort o' craft do—I'faith, I haven't bettered it much! But, no harm meant, my brave fellow! Keep that yataghan for your father's sake. He knew its use, and, if you are long under me—"

"*Under* you?" repeated the youth, his natural spirit breaking out.

"Ha! I like that! Better men than I will soon be under you, I see—'tis in you born and bred! So! let us heave out this precious metal. Six thousand told pounds, if my memory serves me. Heave heartily, boys. There she moves! Now she rises on her toes! Steady strain. Hearty, hearty. There you are!"

"Hafey golt 'tish dat dere, Evan," said one, straightening his bent loins.

"Ap carnach! ant yer may will say tat, poy!" responded Evan, breathing himself and passing the back of his hand across his brow, from which started big drops of perspiration.

They now laid hold of it and dragged it beneath the trapdoor: with the united efforts of the men, the captain, and even Lester—or Hurtel, as for the present he should be called—they got it to the floor above, reascended, and closed the scuttle.

"You will want fresh hands, captain," said the youthful novitiate, at once readily entering into the spirit of his new vocation, and thirsting for excitement as a foil to reflection; "shall I call two of your men from the boat?"

"Ay, ay! do so!" said the captain; adding, as he darted away, "True as steel, by St. Claus! I would rather lose the gold than lose him. He is worth his weight of it!"

While he was speaking his protegé reached the balcony, and, bending over, ordered, in an authoritative tone, two of the men to ascend to relieve their mates. There was a general exclamation of surprise from the party below at the sound of the strange voice.

"Treason!"

"We are betrayed!"

"To the rescue of our captain!" were the various exclamations, in as many different languages, followed by glancing of steel and clicking of pistols, several of which were levelled at the window.

"Ho, fellows! will you not obey?" said he, sternly; "up, up with you! By the cross! if I were your captain, knaves, I would teach you to linger after an order was given."

"Who in the devil have we there?" said one, in a gruff voice. "Shall I pink him, mates?"

"Who talks of pinking? What, ho, ye villains!" shouted the captain, who now appeared at the window. "This youth is my lieutenant, and see that you obey him, or I will make a pair of earrings of a brace of you for the main-yard-arms."

"That's another thing," said several voices. "Orders is orders, if they come from the devil, so as he is got the commission in his pocket!"

"Two of the strongest of you lubberly oxen, clamber up here. Spring! be nimble! nimble! Back the boat directly under, and keep her steady."

A moment afterward two of the men reached the top of the rock and sprung into the balcony. It took but a short time to get the chest upon the balustrade, lash it with the rope they had brought, rig a fall with a brace of oars, and swing it off.

"Stand ready below there!" cried the captain.

"All ready."

"Handle it as if it was a baby. Gently, gently, or you will knock the boat's bottom out! Swing it more aft! There, now, let her drop amidships! Easy—not too fast! There she lies between the thwarts like a pig in a pillory!"

The box was safely lowered into the launch, and followed with alacrity by the men: the captain and his new lieutenant were also preparing to go down,

when each, at the same instant, felt himself touched from behind, and, turning round, Elpsy confronted them.

"Who art thou, in the name of Beelzebub's mother?" demanded the captain, staring with astonishment, not unmingled with superstitious dread, on the deformed and hideous being who had so suddenly and mysteriously appeared to him.

"I would speak with thee, Edmund Turill!"

"Then thou art Sathanas!" he cried, with astonishment; "how knowest thou me?"

"It matters not. I know thee," she replied, in a tone of mystery. "That youth goes with thee?" she added, inquiringly.

"He does!"

"See, then, that he is well treated, and receives not ill at thy hands. Remember, once thou hadst a son!"

"Who art thou, i'the name of all the saints, woman?"

"It matters not. When thou thinkest of thy poor boy's bones, gibbeted for sharing thy guilt o'er the gate of Cork, the winds whistling through them with a sad wail, look kindly on this youth, and take him to thy heart, as if he were thine own flesh and blood!"

"I will do it," he said, with emotion.

"Swear it."

"I swear it!"

"'Tis well. One question I have to ask thee, and truly answer it."

"Name it, woman!"

"Where wanders Hurtel of the Red-Hand?"

"'Tis said he died in the Indies!"

"'Tis false!" she cried, with energy. "He can never die unaccursed by her he has wronged. No, no! he will have one to watch his pillow in his dy-

ing throes he would rather burn in hell, to which he is doomed, than see. No, no! his time has not yet come! his master will not let him slip out o' life so easily. Oh, it will be a glory to see him die; and mock his groans; and laugh, laugh at his terrors! Ha, ha, ha! Oh, will it not be a jubilee to see him struggle with the death!"

"I'God's name, woman, tell me who thou art?"

"Dost not behold what I am? Wouldst have fair winds, I will raise thee foul: wouldst have a smooth sea, I will make it boil and hiss: wilt say a prayer, I will turn it into a curse ere it can leave thy lips."

"Avaunt, sorceress!" he cried, crossing himself with horror.

"Ha, ha! so you can feel my power! Oh, well! it is a-pleasant to make men's stout hearts quake. Dost know me?" she asked, impressively, approaching her face close to his.

"No!" he said, retreating and preparing to descend the rock. "Avoid thee, Sathanas!"

"Listen!" she said, approaching and laying her hand on his arm, and whispering low in his ear.

"*Thou!*" he exclaimed, instantly starting back, and surveying her with mingled surprise, curiosity, and disgust.

"Wouldst care to leave thy revels and their lord, and, stealing to her lone room, offer thy drunken love to her now! Ha, ha, ha! Does she not look a comely leman for thy licentious love?" she added, with malicious irony.

He gazed on her a few seconds by the light of the moon, and seemed too much overpowered by surprise to speak. At length he said, in a tone of horror,

"Hideous as thou art, it must be as thou sayest, for only thus could I be known to thee! But,

holy St. Claus!" he added, in a tone, "this lad—is he—"

"No matter who he is! see thou harm him not!"

"I will be a father to him, woman! 'Fore Heaven," he exclaimed afresh, gazing upon her with mingled curiosity and pity, "was there ever such a—"

"Mind me not! spare your sympathy! Go!—Stay!" she cried, earnestly recalling him; "if you ever meet *him*, breathe not into his ears what and whom you have this night seen. I have made myself known to thee for this youth's sake. Farewell, young man," she said, approaching Lester as he stood on the rock, to which he had bounded from the balcony at the beginning of their conference. She extended her hand as she spoke. He took it, and grasped it warmly, saying, in a soothing tone,

"Good-by, Elpsy. I have no ill-will against thee in my heart. Thou hast done but thy duty!"

The sorceress seemed to be moved, turned away from him without speaking, as if her feelings choked utterance, and stalked away through the hall, and left the tower.

"Come, my lad," said the captain, turning away and speaking with feeling, after following with his eyes her retreating form till it disappeared in the forest, "she is a poor, unhappy creature, and it'll come hard, I'm thinking, on him that made her so. But this is no time for sentiment. Let us aboard and make an offing ere the dawn; for, if we are spied lying here, we shall have the king's bulldog down upon us from windward I saw lying in Cor Bay, who will bark to some purpose if he should catch us here on a lee shore."

Thus speaking, the old seaman lightly descended

the rock to the boat, followed by his youthful lieutenant, and in a few minutes they reached the vessel.

The moment his foot touched the deck the captain gave orders to make sail: the long, crooked tiller was put hard up to windward; the heavy mainsail swung back to its place; the vessel's head turned slowly off, and, feeling the wind on her quarter, she stood in landward for a few seconds to gain headway, and then came gracefully round with her starboard bow to the wind. With each broad sail drawn nearly fore and aft, she lay as near it as her short blunt build would permit, and stretched away from the shore on a long tack towards the south.

CHAPTER VII.

"If solitude succeed to grief,
Release from pain is light relief;
The vacant bosom's wilderness
Might thank the pang that made it less.
The heart once left thus desolate
Must fly at last for ease—to hate."

The Giaour.

The narrative once more returns to Mark, who, it will be remembered, had arrived, on his way to Castle More, at a ruin in the midst of the forest he was traversing, when the approach of two horsemen caused him to withdraw from the path. As he did so, they were encountered and stopped by some one who unexpectedly met them as they were

galloping past the lonely pile. Curious to know who they were and what could be their business at that late hour, he entered the deep shadow of the tower, and approached so near them as to discover that the men wore the livery of Lady Lester, and that the person with whom they were talking was none other than the witch Elpsy, with whose person he had been familiar from childhood.

After Elpsy disappeared from the eyes of the old bucanier and his young lieutenant at Hurtel's tower, she had continued to move rapidly through the forest towards Castle Cor, without turning either to the right or left. Sometimes she would skip forward with mad hilarity till exhausted; at others, leap, and clap her hands, and shout, till the dales of the old wood rung again with her shrieking laughter. From the unnatural speed, and the wild, straightforward direction in which she moved, her sole object seemed to be to reach some point for which she aimed in the least possible time. The scared owl hooted aloud at her approach, and flew, with a heavy flap of his thick wings, deeper into the wood; the hawk left his nest with a shrill cry; the deer fled from her path! On, on she bounded and leaped mocking their notes of terror, like a demon pursued. At times, when she crossed an open glade, where the moon poured down her unobstructed radiance, she would suddenly stop and mutter, but without appearing to notice the pale orb the sight of which, by directing her thoughts into another, but not less turbulent channel, seemed to have exercised a momentary influence on her. She had travelled six miles in less than one hour's time, when she suddenly stopped in the full light of the moon, looked up, and shook her open hands towards it with a laugh of derision.

"Oh, ho! you need not look and watch, and

watch and look, and keep your pale face and shining eyes always fixed on me! Dost think I would commit murder? and the little twinkling stars peer down as if they could espy a knife in my hand! Look, ye little glittering winklings," she cried, spreading upward her open palms, "dost see a knife? Ha, ha, ha! ye are out there. I am too much for ye. No, I know ye well, with your winking and your blinking at each other, and how, in the darkest night, one of you always keeps watch, to spy the murders done in the absence o' the sun; and then you whisper it through heaven, and tell it to the earth, and then we hang for it. Oh, ho! I have a charm will put you to sleep. Ha! you laugh, and grin, and gibber, that I have lost in a half hour's tale what I have won by years of silence. Well, well, there'll be a time! there'll be a time!"

Dropping her head, she appeared a moment as if in sullen thought, and then muttered, in a tone and manner which, more than words, gave a key to the wild phrensy that had hitherto possessed her,

"If *he* cannot be Lord of Lester, neither shall HE! He dies! The eye of the moon pierces not this wood! He dies! 'Tis long yet to dawn," she abruptly added, moving forward, and speaking with more coherency. "If I can find him ere the myrmidons of Lady Lester can reach him, should she send for him, Castle More will ne'er own other lord than he who, but for my foul tongue—may it wither in my throat!—would now have been Lord of Lester. He dies! dies! dies! dies!" and, hasting her footsteps, she continued to repeat the word at every stride, accompanying it with a threatening gesture of her arm.

Her rapid speed soon brought her to the ruins of

the abbey. Bounding like an ape over the fallen blocks, she entered the door in the tower, and with an unfaltering step traversed the gallery to her subterraneous abode, which, after Lester's angry and fruitless pursuit of her, she had left for Hurtel's tower, fearing that he might despatch a party from Castle More in search of her, for the purpose, by her death, of effectually silencing all question of his birth.

Entering her subterranean abode, she produced a light without flint, or steel, or fire, but by smartly drawing two marks, in opposition to the sign of the cross, on the wall with a small stick, the end of which immediately emitted a blue flame, and, after a fierce, hissing noise, shot up into a bright blaze. This, to the peasantry who had witnessed it, was one of the strongest evidences of her being in league with the devil, who, it was asseverated, kindled her stick for her in the unquenchable fire.

She lighted a fragment of a rush candle by the flame, and, opening a small box containing medicinal preparations, took therefrom a small vial containing an amber-coloured liquid, and held it to the light. She looked at it for a while with a look of vengeful satisfaction, and then placed it in her bosom; afterward she took a rusty poniard from a crevice in the wall, carefully felt its point, which was ground to a keen edge, and, with a look of satisfaction, thrust it up into her sleeve. Then extinguishing the light, she hastened past the tomb of Black Morris, and with a quick, determined step, traversed the gallery towards its outlet.

As she approached it she heard the tramp of horses. With a quick, apprehensive cry, as if she at once divined the cause, she flew through the passage into the moonlight, and saw two horsemen approaching at a round pace, and going in the di-

rection of Castle Cor: as they came nearer, she recognised them as the chief forester and the seneschal from Castle More. She permitted them to gallop along the road till they were within a few feet of her, when she suddenly stepped forth from the black shadow of the tower, and, with one arm outstretched brandishing the stiletto, confronted them. The riders, taken by surprise, pulled their horses back to their haunches, and both instantly exclaimed, with superstitious dread,

"Elpsy!"

These were the horsemen Mark turned from his path to avoid.

"I am Elpsy," she repeated, in a lofty tone. "Whither ride ye, so fast and free?

> "If ye do not tell me true,
> Horses each shall cast a shoe,
> And evil bide ye, ill betide,
> As ye on your journey ride!"

"There be strange doings at the castle, mother," said the seneschal, pitching his voice to the true gossiping tone; "there's me young loord—"

"Fait! but it's jist this—" interrupted the other; "our young masther, Lord Robert, is not masther's son at all at all, and masther's son—"

"Murther! an' it's you dat have it wrong, Ennis, honey," cried the other, interrupting him in his turn; "it's jist this, ould Mither Eelpsy; Lord Robert is not my Lord Robert at all at all, and the raal Lord Robert is—"

"And is it not the very woords I was afther telling the crathur?" interrupted the forester. "I will give it to ye, Eelpsy, dare, in the right way."

"Hist with your tongues!" cried the impatient woman, having heard enough to convince her that Robert had told the truth in saying that he openly published his own shame. "Hold with your sense-

less words, fools! I can tell ye more than both of ye together, and all Castle Cor, know."

"We know dat, ould mither! Don't forget to crass yourself, Jarvey, honey," added the speaker, aside, making the sign of the cross on his breast. "It's the great dale ye know, and the likes o' ye, and it's not we that is to gainsay it this night."

"Whither ride ye?" she demanded, impatiently taking hold of the bridle of one of the horses.

"Och, an' isn't it to bring with all speed that young jintleman o' the world, Mark Meredith, the ould fisherman's son, to be sure, to Castle More," said the forester.

"At whose bidding?" she demanded.

"Our lady's, the jewil!" answered the seneschal.

"Go back, and tell the Dark Lady of the Rock that thus says Elpsy, the sorceress: 'He whom she seeks she will never find!'"

"But it's the disthress she'll be in," said the seneschal.

"And it's the deep grief o' the world that's upon her now," added the other.

"Och, but it will be bad news to be afther bringing back to her that sint us," pursued Ennis, with a howl.

"Widout iver having gone at all at all," said Jarvey, in a tone of grief.

"A cush-la-ma-chree, Jarvey, but it's find the lad we must!" cried Ennis, with sudden resolution.

"And it's the ould mither that's here, bliss her, 'll maybe till us where he may be jist at this present," added Jarvey, insinuatingly.

"Do you hesitate to obey me! Go back, even as you came. If *she* ask you where the lad is, tell her Elpsy has said, '*Lester has no lord!*'"

"Och, hone! and will it be the world's thruth,

Elpsy, hinney! It'll break the spirit of her, in her lone bosom."

"And what'll the castle do widout a lord! That I should live to see it!" wailed the seneschal.

"And must we go back to the Dark Lady wid dis heavy sorrow to the fore?" asked the forester.

"E'en must ye! So!" she cried, turning, with a sudden jerk of the rein, the head of one of the horses towards the direction in which they had come. "Ride, ride," she added, in a commanding but wild tone, "nor look behind till ye are safe within the gates, lest ye care to see the evil one astraddle of your crupper."

"The houly crass protict us!" they both ejaculated, crossing themselves.

"Good e'en to ye, mither. It's yourself is the crathur for knowing the world's thruth," added Jarvey, as if by flattery he would disarm any evil intention she might cherish in reference to himself.

"And it's to her we're indibted for not riding tree leagues for nothing at all at all, whin the lad's not to the fore! Faix, it's my thanks ye have, ould Elpsy, for't, an' its yer due, were ye the ould divil himself," returned Ennis, gathering up his rein. "Kape your head straight between yer shoulder, Jarvey."

"It's me, honey, will niver be afther looking behint," replied Jarvey, setting his face towards Castle More.

Thus taking leave of the wily woman, these two old simple-minded retainers rode back again; their obtuse minds probably scarce comprehending the nature of the loss Lady Lester had met with, the exchanged fortunes of their late young master, nor the important object of their mission.

She looked after them as they galloped away

till they were lost in the gloom of the forest, when, clapping her hands, she broke into a peal of frantic merriment, which was more like the shriek of a fiend than like human laughter.

"Ah, ha! have I not done it well! I met them here just in time. Satan stands my friend yet! If he did make me lose the game, he has helped to keep another from winning it. No, Lester shall never have a lord at the expense of him who, but for my accursed tongue and his silly *honour!* would still have been its master. Ho, ho! have I not done it! Now it remains for me, ere he can learn the secret of his birth, to send him where low and highborn are all on a level! This! and, if this fail, *this*," she said, grasping first the vial and then the dagger, "shall do my will! It's a wicked act—I know it!—'tis a deed of hell! I would not harm the poor lad—no; for he is like an own child to me—but, then, he is *not* my child—and shall I see him in the seat from which *he* has been cast out? No, no, this steel shall drink—this poison shall dry up, his noble blood first!"

"Of whom do you speak in such fearful words, mother?"

She started with mingled terror and astonishment, and beheld standing at her side the unconscious object of her thoughts. Her surprise at his sudden, and, as she at first believed, supernatural appearance, for the moment deprived her of her speech; she dropped the hand that held the vial, which was dashed in pieces against a stone, and gazed on him for several seconds with a disturbed and remorseful countenance.

"Did you hear all my words?" she at length had the resolution to ask, advancing a step towards him, and speaking in a deep, husky tone.

"No, mother. I have been in the shadow of

yonder bastion, waiting the departure of those horsemen."

"Then you could not hear their speech?" she interrogated, with an eagerness of voice and manner that he could not account for.

"No," he answered, firmly.

"You have not spoken with them?"

"No."

"They have not told you—that is, you are Mark Meredith, the grandson of old Meredith, the fisherman? Speak, boy!"

"Surely I am, Elpsy; do you not discern my face by this moon? I fear," he said, in a kind tone, "you have not taken good care of yourself of late, and are a little fevered. Go down to our hut, if you can walk so far, and you will find a meal of fish there, of my own taking, which I left my grandsire preparing for me. Bid him give you my portion. Good-night, Elpsy, I have business at Castle More."

As he spoke he stepped aside to pass her and pursue his way. His hospitable and kind invitation had touched her. She was not so seared that gentleness and words of kindness could not find a vibrating chord within her bosom. Gradually, as he spoke she relaxed her hand from its grasp on the poniard, which, on discovering him, she had instinctively concealed in the folds of her scarlet cloak, and extended it towards him in a grateful manner. But the expression of his intention to proceed to the abode of Lady Lester caused her suddenly to draw it back, while in a quick, harsh tone of voice, and with great vehemence of manner, in which alarm and apprehension were visible, she cried,

"Castle More! What hast thou to do at Castle More?"

"I bear a message to Robert of Lester! Detain

me not, Elpsy; I have already lingered on the way."

"Who sends thee?"

"The young lady of Bellamont."

"Thy message?"

"I know not. 'Tis in this sealed pacquet."

"Is this all for which thou art sent?"

"It is."

"No instructions—no commands?"

"None, save to make no delay at Castle More, lest my young lord and I should renew a quarrel we had this day."

"Nothing else?"

"Nothing. But why these rapid questions—this anxiety of manner? What has come over thee, Elpsy?" he asked, with surprise.

She had put this series of interrogations to him with an irresistible energy and rapidity, that left him no alternative but direct and instant replies. At first she gave him no answer; her face worked convulsively, and she seemed to be contending with some strong feelings, that she in vain strove to get the mastery over. At length she muttered within her lips,

"I had feared! But 'tis safe, safe. 'Tis a pity to slay the fair young lad; but, if I do not, he will know that which he never must know—become that he never shall become! He must not see Castle More. He must die rather! Mark, come to me," she said, in a hollow and unearthly tone; "I would whisper in your ear what I would not have the laughing and grinning devils that flit about us in the air, hear! Come to me and listen!"

While she was speaking she nervously grasped the handle of her dagger, and took a step towards him. Her manner hitherto had already aroused his watchfulness, and the tone of her invitation by

no means increased his confidence. He did not, indeed, suspect any attempt upon his life by her; but, being familiar with her restless and violent nature, he was prepared to expect some annoying violence; and for this he was cautiously on the watch.

"Wilt not approach?" she said, in a coaxing tone. "'Tis a sweet and fair tale I would tell thee! Ha, ha! as fair and sweet as I told the Lord Robert yestere'en! Wilt not come?" she shouted, as she saw he continued to step back as she advanced; "then will I come!"

She, with these words, made a spring towards him, seized him suddenly by the breast, and brandished her poniard in the air. He was not unprepared for this, sudden as it was: he caught her upraised arm, and bent it backward over her head till she shrieked with pain, and, with a cool and determined exertion of his whole strength, cast her from him so violently as to hurl her to the earth. She sprang to her feet like a cat, and, with a yell of rage, again leaped upon him. He avoided her attack by lightly springing to one side, when, missing her blow, she fell forward and struck her head on the edge of a stone, and sunk to the ground senseless and bleeding.

He instantly flew to her relief, lifted her from the earth, and attempted to assuage the flow of blood from a severe contusion that she had received on the forehead. In a little time the loss of blood restored her to consciousness; it also had the effect of subduing her high fever of excitement, and making her comparatively calm. She permitted him to bind a handkerchief, that he took from his own neck, across her temples; but she neither spoke nor acknowledged his attentions, but sat in sullen silence on the ground.

"Elpsy," asked the youth, at length, "why do you seek my life?"

"You can never know!" she replied, slowly shaking her head with morose inflexibility.

"Have I wronged you?"

"Ask me not!"

"Is it thirst for blood, evil woman, that drives thee to this crime?"

"I would not slay thee, but thou and I, boy, can never live in the same land!" she said, obstinately.

"Thou mightst have spared this attempt, then, on my life, for soon the deep sea will roll between me and my native isle."

"How! Explain your words!" she asked, with awakened interest.

"I am resolved, as nature has denied me nobility of birth, to give it at least to those who come after me."

"Speak on!" she cried, hanging on his words with intense expectation.

"I am going from my father's roof into the world, to see if I cannot make men forget from what I have sprung!"

"Is this thy purpose, boy? Speak truly!"

"It is, Elpsy. Seven hours ago I had nearly linked my fortunes with the yacht that takes the earl to England on the morrow—but—"

"But, what?" she eagerly demanded.

"My father—I thought of him, and—"

"Would not."

"I cannot desert him to suffering and want."

"And is this all?" she asked, her face lighting up with a newly awakened thought.

"The sole cause."

She began eagerly to search her belt, and drew forth from it a heavy purse. Shaking it with a gratified air, she then poured its glittering contents on the ground beside her

"See that pile of gold! To-morrow go in this king's ship, and it shall be yours—there are three hundred guilders told—'twill give the old man food and raiment for a longer life than his will be, and afterward buy a coffin for his bones. Wilt go?"

"Mother," said he, his heart leaping with joy and hope, yet both tempered with the doubt to which he gave utterance, "this wealth! is it thine? How came you by it?"

"It matters not."

"I dare not touch it. I fear 'tis the price of sin—or, perhaps, of blood."

"Fool; 'tis wealth I've had in store these eighteen years, given to me by times by one who, if there be justice in Heaven or hell, is now accursed on earth. There is no more evil in it than in every piece of gold that the earth contains—all gold is evil—it is all but the price of honour, of honesty, or of human blood. Take it, and depart from this land."

He gazed on the glittering heap, and hope, by its aid, pictured bright visions of the future, and the fruition of all his aspiring wishes. Ambition once more awakened in his heart. Yet he hesitated. But, while he did so, he thought of Kate Bellamont—of the proud Lester—of his hopes of the future—of all that he had loved to contemplate; he even gave a thought to Grace Fitzgerald: all that an aspiring mind like his, at such a time, could be influenced by, had its effect upon him. She narrowly watched his countenance, read rightly his thoughts, and, feeling assured of his acceptance of it, mentally congratulated herself that her object could be effected without the shedding of his blood. She waited till she thought his mind was sufficiently ripe for her purpose, then replaced the gold in the purse, and, balancing it in her hand, said,

"Before you take this purse, I name one condition of its acceptance."

He looked to her to mention it.

"That you for ever drop your present name and assume another; that you never breathe to mortal ear the place of your birth, nor give clew to your country."

"I gladly promise this—for already I had resolved on it, Elpsy. I have *one* great motive for doing so. But what can be yours?"

"'Tis no matter. You promise this?"

"Cheerfully."

"Then take the gold for thy grandsire's support."

"Thanks, thanks, kind Elpsy—yet—"

"Not a word of objection. I have two favours to ask of thee."

"Name them," said he, with an eagerness that evinced a desire to serve her.

"Promise that you will hold no speech with any one before thy departure."

"I do," he said, after an instant's hesitation.

"Swear that thou wilt never set foot on this isle again."

"Nay, I will not swear it," he said, with determination.

"Wilt thou obey me? Swear it!" she cried, in a tone of fierce command.

"Who art thou that I should yield thee obedience, woman? I yield obedience to none save my Maker!"

"Wilt thou swear?" she asked, with more composure.

"Never."

The resolute attitude he so unexpectedly assumed disconcerted her for an instant. At length she said,

"Wilt thou promise never to return here under thy own, that is—thy present name?"

"Yes, most freely. Now farewell, Elpsy; I must hasten to Castle More."

"You go not to Castle More!" she exclaimed, with singular emphasis.

"I am intrusted with a message, and must deliver it."

"Give it to me, I will be its bearer."

"Nay, I must myself place it in Lord Robert's hands, in person."

"Give it me, boy! I will bear it safely to its destination."

"No, Elpsy."

"Go to Castle More, and you sail not on the morrow," she said, in a determined tone, replacing the gold in her belt.

He hesitated. After a brief struggle between his duty to Grace Fitzgerald and her cousin, and his own wishes, he at length said, falteringly,

"May I trust you to deliver it, Elpsy?"

"Yes."

He turned the billet, with its lock of hair, over and over, gazed on it long and fondly on every side, and, from his reluctance to resign the precious treasure, there appeared to have arisen a new bar to Elpsy's purpose. At length he made a compromise with his feelings by slipping off the braid of hair, and hastily concealing it in his bosom, while he gave her the unsecured packet.

"Place it only in the hands of Robert of Lester, Elpsy."

"None else shall see it."

"Speedily, if you are not too ill."

"It will take many a harder buffet than that thou gavest me to make me ill. He shall have it ere thou art half a league on thy return."

"Then, Elpsy, I go. Fare thee well, and may Heaven have you in better keeping than your life now gives hope of. Will you call at times when I am away to see my grandfather? He will be lonely."

"Many will be the gossip we'll yet have together. Now go! Take my blessing—'twill do thee no harm, if it can do no good! When does the ship sail?"

"The Earl of Bellamont will return from Kinsale in the morning, and 'tis said that before noon she will be under weigh."

"The sooner the better. Go at once on board, nor let the rising sun find thee on the land. Farewell."

"Farewell, Elpsy. Don't forget the poor old man!"

"He shall never want while Elpsy lives. Now fare thee well, and—*remember!*" she added, impressively.

They now separated; the young man rapidly retracing his way to his hut, with a buoyant tread and lightness of spirit, his imagination filled with dazzling visions of the future; Elpsy bending her steps steadily in the direction of Castle More, her soul exulting in the master-stroke of policy she had effected. When he was no longer visible, she stopped, and, opening the packet, by the light of the moon curiously examined the locket and its device, the application of which, without understanding its motto, she intuitively comprehended, and then read the contents of the billet with a loud, scornful laugh.

"And would she meet him *now* with love? Ha, ha! The haughty maiden would toss her head, did he bear this to her, she knowing his birth. Oh!" she added, with a malignant chuckle, "that I had

let him married her ere this secret had let out—would it not have been a brave thing then to have brought down the pride of these gentles! If I could have kept the secret till their honeymoon was over! Fiends!" she exclaimed, with maddened disappointment, "what precious revenge I have lost! Shall I not have a taste of what is left me? Shall I not yet tell her *who* and *what* he is? Oh, will it not be joy to my soul to witness her ravings! I'll do't! I'll do't! There's something left yet to live for! There's mischief yet to do in the earth. But I must first watch this sprout of Lester—this fisher's boy! I shall not have to touch his life if he'll get off before he learns his true rank; but I'll follow him like his shadow, nor will I take eyes off him till the ship he sails in goes out of my sight beyond the ocean's edge. Then will I to Castle Cor, and see if Lady Kate will receive me, the bearer of this locket, 'with love!' Haven't I a tale for her delicate ear! Oh, there is yet something to live for! Elpsy'll not die while there's devil's work to do! So! methinks I feel a little giddy for walking," she continued, tottering against the trunk of a tree; "but I'll soon fall into my old gait. A little bloodletting of a moonshiny night is ever good for the health."

Thus muttering to herself, she turned back towards the ruin, and began to walk in the direction taken by Mark, at first slowly; but, gradually gathering strength with motion and excitement, she soon strode through the long, dark glades of the forest at a rate that soon brought her in sight of him. Keeping so far in the rear as not to be discovered by him should he chance to turn his head, she followed him out of the wood, then down to the seaside and along the beach, till she saw him, just as the day broke, lift the latch of the door of his hum-

ble cot and disappear within. She then sought a recess in the cliff in the rear of the hut, where, secreting herself in a clump of low bushes that grew about it, she remained concealed until some time after sunrise, when she saw him reappear accompanied by the fisherman, and beheld both go together to the beach, launch their little fisher's bark, hoist the sail, and leave the shore. She eagerly watched them as they stood off from the land, and with unspeakable triumph saw them run alongside of the yacht. With emotions of malignant joy, she beheld Mark take leave of his grandsire and get on board, and the solitary old man quit the vessel alone and steer in shore towards his desolate hut. As his skiff grated upon the beach, she met him.

"So ho, father Meredith! thou hast been selling thy fish to a good market. The English have the silver coin, which thou wilt scarce find at the Cove ayond. What price gave these warsmen for thy herring the morn, gossip?" she inquired, assisting him with her arm from the boat as she spoke.

"It was no sale o' the herring at all, woman Elpsy," said the old man, shaking his head mournfully, and placing the stone kedge of his boat in a crevice in the rocks so as to secure it against being borne off by the ebbing tide; "it's no a sale o' the fish, woman dear, but o' my own flesh and blood. Och hone! och hone! and it's the ould gray-headed man'll never see his face more!"

He turned towards the yacht as he spoke, and stretching forth his hands towards it, wailed aloud: at length his lament ceased, or, rather, changed to a flood of tender epithets, eloquent with the depth of Irish sorrow, which he applied to the youth, while his dim eyes were vainly strained towards

the vessel, to distinguish once more his beloved form.

"What means this sorrow, father Meredith? Who hast thou sold?"

"The lad—my grandson! a-cush la-ma chree! I have sold him for gold. There, woman, take thine again! I will none of it!" he cried, with sudden vehemence, drawing the purse she had given Mark from his jacket, and throwing it at her feet. "'Tis the price of blood, and I will not have it, evil woman."

"Hear me, father Meredith," she said, deliberately placing her hands upon his shoulders, and looking him earnestly in the face. "I know the purpose of thy visit to yonder king's ship. I know whom thou hast left there. Thou hast done well and wisely in permitting him to depart. He has left gold for thy wants, and has told thee how he came by it. 'Twas my gift to him and thee."

"'Tis the price o' his blood, woman!" he said, with a heavy moan of mingled grief and indignation.

"'Tis the price of his life, old man! Were he not now in yonder brigantine, the sands ere this would have drunken his blood," she added, with fierceness. "Hist! ask not what I mean. What I have said is true. I have sent him away to save his life, and that there may be one less murder on the earth. Go to thy hut and content thee with this gold. 'Tis a friendly gift, old father. 'Twill save thee from labour so long as thy life shall last. I will come and gossip with thee o' evenings, and, hey! sirs," she cried, skipping on before him with fantastic gambols, as he placed his slender oars on his shoulder, "won't we pass the time merrily? I will make fairies dance before thy door o' moonshiny nights for thy entertainment; call the mermaids up from the bottom o' the blue sea to sing thee to sleep

when thou art aweary; and tell thee tales o' hobgoblins and spirits till the moon fades in the morning. Oh, we will have times, father Meredith!"

"But will he come back, Elpsy, woman?"

"The devil forbid!" she responded, half aloud. "Ay, father; thou wilt yet see him return a brave sailor, and with piles o' wealth. Faith, sirs, I would not wonder if he should build thee a castle with his gold, and make a lord o' thee. Ha, ha, ha, father Meredith! thou wouldst make a proper lord!"

"He, he, he! Elpsy, thou art pleasant. If the lad's gone, I'll make the best o't till the saints give him back in good time. Come to my hut and break thy fast, avourneen! He was ever o'er lofty, and had notions above his class. He was unhappy, the creature, because he was not equal with the young Lord o' Castle More. Be-dad! Elpsy, honey, one would ha' thought he were of gentle blood!"

She started, and closely scrutinized the old fisherman's face; but, seeing nothing to confirm her now constantly active suspicions, she said,

"He was above his birth, as you say, gossip! The sea will be a school for him, and teach him his place. He will make a better sailor than lord. Ha, ha, ha! will he not, father Meredith?" and she laughed coldly and sarcastically as she spoke.

"He was always a good sailor, Elpsy, woman! Ne'er a ship came int' the Cove he went not up to her main truck; nor a craft lay becalmed i' the sight o' the bay he went not aboard and through every part o' her. He knew every rope in a ship as well as an admiral, the crathur! Ah, woman, he could do an officer's duty this day as well as the keptain o' the yacht yonder. He seemed to take to a seaman's life nat'rally, and it was ever discontented

he was in the skiff. He loved to talk o' big ships, and foreign lands, battles by sea, and storms, and shipwreck, and the likes o' them things; and, with all his high notions, he ever loved a sailor betther than a lord, and the sailors all liked him, the jewil!"

"He is in his place, then, father Meredith," said Elpsy, chiming in with the favourable train of the old fisherman's garrulous praises of the youth. "Thou wouldst not call him ashore now an thou couldst."

"Nay, I would not say that, Elpsy, woman. Yet I begin to think the lad be best where he is. Yet it will be a dark day to my soul when the ship sails a-sea with him — the light o' my eyes! the core o' my heart! Och, hone! Sad will be the day to the soul o' me, Elpsy, woman! Come in, crathur, honey, an' take a bite o' the breakfast. It's you it is that's the comfort o' my lone bosom now, avourneen!"

"No, no, I have much to do the mornin', old man!" she said, turning from the door as the fisherman, after standing his oars up beside it, placed his hand upon the latch. "Take the gold freely; it is thine!" she added, casting it through the window upon the earthen floor of the cabin. "When the ship sails I will eat."

"Take a drap o' the dew, Elpsy, dear!" continued the old man, the grief, which at his age is always superficial, having, like a child's, been diverted for the time by the rattling gossip of the weird woman.

"Elpsy will fast from all save water till the masts of yonder yacht are shut from my sight by the meeting of sea and sky!"

She waved her hand with a lofty gesture as she spoke, as if she sought to impress the fisherman

by her manner alone, and strode away from the hut towards the path that led up to the castle.

Grace Fitzgerald, after communicating the result of her interview with Mark, had left Kate to her repose. But, with grief at her feud with Lester, and her lively anticipations of beholding him at her feet, to be raised from that humble posture to her forgiving embrace, her mind was too active for rest, and sleep fled from her pillow, leaving it in the sole possession of her ardent thoughts. With the first blush of day, her face scarce less roseate than the morning sky with the consciousness of her object, she rose and threw open her lattice, and turned her face, with earnest expectation, towards the forest-path which led northward towards Castle More. From time to time she would lean far out of the window, and, with eager ear, listen as if to catch some distant sound. At length, with a look and exclamation of disappointment, not undivested of a slight shade of feminine pique, she closed the lattice and cast herself upon her pillow again, saying, in a tone of wounded pride,

"I care not! he is unworthy of a thought! I will forget him and try to sleep!"

She closed her eyelids, as if, at the same time, she expected her fevered thoughts, like the flower which folds its leaves together when the sun withdraws its light, would also shut themselves up and leave her to repose. But she now thought more vividly and acutely than before. It at length occurred to her that there might have been some delay on the part of the messenger. Perhaps Lester had not yet got her pacquet, or had just received it, and was now on his way to her!

"I will wait a little longer!" she said, unclosing her eyes, and rising and going to the lattice.

A long time she remained here, with her eyes fixed on the forest path, and her ears acutely set, to catch the most distant sound of horses' feet.

"He comes not yet!" she sighed, with deep disappointment. "Yet he may soon be here! Hark! is not that his horse? No, 'tis a deer bounding along to the spring!"

At the moment a cool vein of wind from the sea chilled her, and, glancing at her dress as she drew it together across her bosom, she discovered, what she had hitherto been inattentive to, that she was in her night-robes.

"And I dare say I should have run to meet him as I am! What a foolish child!" she said, blushing with confusion and innocent shame. "'Tis fortunate he did not come before! I will dress, and by that time he may be here!"

Hope, hope, hope! Star of woman's love! In thy celestial journeyings, thou dost never set on the limitless empire of her affections. Her wide heart has no horizon beneath which thou canst go down and disappear. Patient, long suffering, ever hoping to the last, she steers by thee her bark of love through storm and danger, faithfully and fearlessly, never losing sight of thee till, from her expectant eye, death steals the power of reflecting longer thy radiance!

When she had completed her toilet, and found that there were still no indications of Lester's approach, she became impatient, and, throwing a hood and veil over her head, she left her chamber and hastened below. For what purpose she hardly knew—impulse alone prompted her footsteps. She hastened through the hall, and descended into the castle yard, and directed her course towards the forest. She had entered the verge of its gloomy shades, which the morning sun had scarcely yet driven out,

and was penetrating its depths, when she suddenly stopped.

"Where am I going? what am I doing?" she exclaimed, as if her feet had been involuntarily obeying her thoughts hitherto, and she for the first time had discerned that she was really doing what she supposed she was only thinking of doing. Such absent reveries are peculiar to young persons in love!

"Am I really going to meet him? I did not know that I did love Lester so. But he would scorn me to find me here—I will hasten back as I came —though I scarce have any consciousness how that was! What a simple creature I have made of myself. I am afraid of my own ridicule. Oh love, love, you do play the mischief with maiden's hearts when once you get into them!" she said, sportively, yet ending her words with a deep sigh.

Turning back, she retraced her steps slowly towards the castle. As she approached it, her eyes were attracted by the pavilions, which still remained standing, and, bending her steps towards the lawn, she entered that which had been the scene of the yesterday's festival. No signs of the banquet remained—all, save the curtains of the tent, and one or two rustic sofas within it, were removed. She seated herself on one of these, and raising the north side of the tent-hangings by one of the silken cords attached to them, was enabled, without being seen, to command the avenue to the forest. With her person bent a little forward, and holding her handkerchief in her hand, as if prepared to wave it at an instant's notice, she sat watching in the direction in which she expected Lester to appear.

"I will meet him here," she said; "I would not have even cousin Grace, good as she is, to witness our interview of reconciliation. Oh, why does he

linger so! Well, Robert, I have been taught a lesson in a knowledge of my own heart by this; and, let us but meet in peace once more, I will bear much ere I will make either you or myself so miserable again."

She sighed deeply as she spoke, and a glittering tear, like a drop of dew shaken from a spray, fell upon her hand.

"Surely he cannot love me, to linger so!" she said, dropping her aching eyes, which had long kept watch on the distant path.

"Proud maiden, thou hast spoken truly! he loves thee not!"

Kate turned in alarm as the stern, harsh voice that spoke these words sounded close to her ear, and beheld the weird woman.

"Elpsy!" she cried, rising and speaking between terror and surprise.

"The *witch* Elpsy, lady," added the sorceress, sarcastically.

"What would you, woman?"

"Thyself."

"How mean you?" exclaimed the maiden, shrinking involuntarily back.

"Fear me not, lady!" she said, slowly and with mysterious emphasis, as she gazed on the face of the fair girl, her eyes gloating with a diabolical light; "I would not harm thy body, while I hold the key to thy soul."

"Fearful woman, if woman, or even human, thou art, what terrible meaning lies hidden beneath your words?"

"Thou lovest Robert of Lester?"

"Elpsy, I will not be questioned. Leave me," said Kate, her brow glowing between maidenly shame and anger.

But Elpsy, without heeding her command or

seeming to observe her emotion, said, with the sardonic quiet that malice can put on when it would wound,

"Thou didst despatch a messenger to Castle More the last night, lady?"

"How knowest thou this?" she demanded, evasively, startled at her knowledge of what she believed known only to the parties immediately interested.

"Is there aught, daughter of the house of Bellamont, that happens among mortals," she said, in the elevated tone of mystery and supernatural power she was wont to assume at such times, "that Elpsy the sorceress is ignorant of?"

"I know thou art a dread and fearful woman," said Kate, with a thrill of aversion, "and have power to do evil, which, rather than good, I have heard it is thy delight to do."

"Ha, ha! thou hast well spoken," she responded, with a chuckling laugh, that caused the maiden, with all her firmness, to shudder and start back to the extremity of the pavilion.

"You fear me. Well, it is what I would have. Ho! 'Tis pleasant to be feared by the lovely and the pure—by the strong and the mighty; to be sought out by the noble, and have the homage of the low! Oh, it's a brave thing, this holding sway over the minds of mortals. Kings may govern their bodies —*we* hold the empire of their souls! Ha, ha! So you fear me, trembler?"

"An angel would tremble before thee, guilty one!"

"Ha, ha! I know it. Thou hast spoken it. It is the reward held out to us that we shall one day master the good spirits."

"And how? Alone by the power of darkness and of sin! You conquer through fear, not by

strength. Therefore it is that good spirits dare not enter the abodes of the prince of evil. Woman, thou art fearful; thy spells sinful; thy soul lost for ever!" she cried, with virtuous horror united to the natural enthusiasm of her character.

"Soul!" repeated the sorceress, with a writhing lip of derision; "*soul!*"

"Hast thou no soul, woman, in the name of God!" exclaimed the maiden, appalled by the emphasis she laid on the word as she repeated it a second time.

The sorceress gazed on her a moment fixedly ere she replied, and then advancing a pace towards her, said hoarsely,

"Yes!"

"Woman," continued Kate, with solemn earnestness, turning pale at the manner in which she pronounced this monosyllable, "I know thou art wicked and full of evil; but thou canst not have bartered thy eternal life? have made compact with Sathanas, at the hazard of thy salvation?"

Elpsy was moved with surprise by the energy with which she was addressed, and, banishing her derisive smile, answered in a more natural tone,

"By compact no, lady! none save but with my own nature; even as all who are mortal do barter away their souls when they obey the devil within. I have served him in the shape of evil passions till his I am, soul and body!"

"Say not so, Elpsy," said Kate, touched with pity by the sullen despair and abandonment of her manner, although in it not a shade of remorse or penitence was apparent even to her charitable gaze; "if you have sinned, there is forgiveness to be had of Heaven! It is not too late to secure your soul's future happiness. I know there is much that is kind and humane in you when you are not gored

by insults, or under the influence of angry emotions. Abandon your course of life; seek forgiveness of Him who died for the chiefest of sinners. I pity you, Elpsy."

The sorceress hung her head upon her breast in silence: her bosom heaved with inward struggles; her harsh features became convulsed, and the maiden thought she saw a tear fall from her eyes to the ground. Encouraged by these signs of good, she added, approaching her in a kindly manner,

"Cast off this assumed character, if, as I sincerely trust, it is not irrevocably made thine own by thy soul's price. I will furnish for thee a neat cottage not far from Cormac, the forester's, and thou shalt have the comforts about thee thy old age craves. Do not despair of forgiveness, Elpsy. God is merciful, and will meet thee in kindness more than half the way if—"

"Angel! fiend! mock me not!" shrieked the woman, suddenly lifting her face furrowed with tears, gnashing her glittering teeth, her eyes flashing, her clinched hands shaking with nervous excitement, and her whole bearing that of a pythoness enraged and fear-stricken. "There is no God—no heaven for me! Yes, I am bought, body and soul! Talk not to me of your Christ! For a moment I was carried back to childhood as you spoke," she continued, with a sudden change of manner; "for I have been once innocent as thyself. But 'tis past!" she cried, fiercely. "Your words can move me no more! They have pressed out the last drop of moisture that remained in my heart! I am adamant now—hard—hard—hard as iron! Ha, ha, ha! Elpsy a Christian! Accursed be the name!"

Kate Bellamont, at this sudden and terrific outbreak from one whom she believed had been softened by her words, retreated from the vehemence

of her language and the savage wildness of her manner, with the look and attitude of one who suddenly beholds the lion which he has tamed start suddenly from his playful embrace, and assume all at once the savage ferocity of his nature. She was astonished beyond expression by this unexpected ebullition of feeling, and her mind was appalled both by her terrible language and the new ground she had assumed.

"Elpsy, stand from the door and let me pass!" she said, with firmness, yet trembling through every fibre of her body, as Elpsy, after speaking, continued to gaze on her in gloomy silence, and with a lowering and menacing aspect.

"Nay," said the sorceress, placing herself full in the way, and speaking with more mildness even than was usual to her, "I have news that concerns thee."

"Me?"

"None else."

"Of what?"

"The young Lord of Lester."

"What of him? Thy looks—thy language—that fearful smile!"

"Dost love him?"

"It matters not to thee. Speak what thou hast to say, and quickly," she cried, with an indefinable foreboding of evil.

"Thou dost, maiden. It is written in every lineament; speaks in every action—yea, Robert of Lester is thy second self. Ha, ha, ha! Did I not say I held the key to thy soul—ay, and I can unlock it, too!"

Having, in the first heat of her vengeance at finding herself defeated by the course taken by Lester, resolved to divulge to Kate Bellamont the secret of his birth that she might triumph in her hu-

mility and wretchedness, Elpsy's fertile mind soon taught her how best to effect her malicious, and, save its wickedness, aimless purpose. She now, therefore, in a tone of assumed carelessness, added,

"But thou lovest him because he is noble like thyself! Were he lowly in name and humble in birth, thou wouldst scorn him," she added, with the manner of one who is trying the moral pulse of her victim: "this is ever the way with the high-born."

"Were he lower born than the hind who herds my father's kine, he would still be Lester, and noble to me!" she said, with a spirit that became her lofty beauty and devoted love.

"This will never do," muttered Elpsy, thoughtfully, intent on her cruel design, and forgetful of, and insensible to, the gratitude due to the maiden for the kindly interest she had so recently expressed in her welfare; in repayment of which, with all the maliciousness of a demon, she was now taxing her ingenuity to dash from her lips the cup of happiness which young love had offered to them.

"Were he a cowherd, he would have a cowherd's common soul, maiden!"

"Being common he then could not be Lester. But being Lester, though a swineherd, that inherent nobleness, that is the birthright of his nature, would shine out through his mean garb and calling, and make him still, to my eyes, the Lester I love."

"Were he a slave—a serf—ay, chained to a galley, wouldst thou love him still?"

"If misfortune, and not crime, brought him to this degradation—then should I not love him less, but love him more!"

"If 'twere crime?"

"Couple it not with his name, woman," she said, with flashing eyes. "But why this dark and subtle questioning? Speak, I command thee!"

"Thou hast no power to command me—I no will to obey. I will probe her yet deeper!" she muttered. "If, maiden, there were a stain upon his birth—"

"Well—" she quickly interrupted, with painful eagerness visible in every lineament of her beautiful countenance: for her feelings were highly wrought up, and, excited to expectation of something evil by the manner of her interrogator, she was all nerves and on the rack of torturing suspense. "Well—speak, prithee, woman! Why do you pause?"

"If 'twere proven he were a—a—"

"Say—"

"A—nay, 'twill wound thy ears!"

"Speak—I fear not—for I know thou canst lay no crime to his charge!"

"A *bastard!*" she said, laying a deliberate stress upon each syllable.

"Evil woman! away! Leave me!"

"It may be proved that he is not only this, but—"

"Away! Oh that I should listen to thy foul and slanderous speech."

"*Low-born!*"

"In the name of Heaven, woman, cease! and give me way out, or I will alarm the castle, and have thee punished for this insolence!"

As the indignant girl spoke she prepared to pass her, when the woman laid her hand firmly on her wrist and detained her, while she said, in a serious and imperious manner,

"Maiden, hear me! I am not mocking thee! What if I can prove him to thee to be a lowborn

bastard—the son of a peasant-girl, and palmed on Lady Lester as her own?"

"Thou canst do no such thing with all thy wicked arts to aid thee," scornfully replied the maiden.

"What if I could do it! Wouldst love him then?"

"Yes."

"The bastard?"

"Yes, I tell thee."

"The son of a lowborn peasant?"

"He would still be Lester to me, so long as honour and truth were the habitants of his bosom."

"Wouldst thou love him then?"

"Better and better for each misfortune he brought not on himself."

"Or serf—or galley-slave—or peasant—or bastard, he would still be Lester in the eyes of thy love?"

"Yes! Stand aside, and let me pass forth."

"One word more, fair virgin. I must try," continued she to herself, "my last card now. Her love outwits my invention. 'Tis a shield that turns aside all my shafts. I think I now know her weakness, and so will put it to trial. Suppose," she asked, in an indifferent tone, "this Robert of Lester should take offence at thee—"

"Well—" she said, with interest.

"And should ride from thee in anger—"

"Proceed—prithee—"

"And, being too proud to atone, lets his pride grow till it beget hatred and scorn of thee—"

"Well—"

"And so, from wounded love and rage, he forswears his noble name, and leagues himself with pirates; and, out of revenge to thee, goes forth to slay, and deluge the earth with blood and rapine!"

"Have you done?" she asked, in a tone of dis-

dain for what she deemed the idle words of the speaker.

"I have," she answered, with a peculiar smile, that troubled and perplexed her. "But I would ask thee—wouldst love him then?"

"I will answer thee—if such things could be, which ne'er can be—No. In this case, guilt would place for ever an impassable gulf between us. But, as thou hast so much interest in him, let me pass that I may meet him, for I hear his horse's feet in the forest," she said, with the contempt of incredulity, yet trembling—so well the supposed case advanced by Elpsy tallied with the circumstances under which Lester left her—lest there might be some dreadful truth at the bottom.

"His horse's feet thou wilt never hear more. Himself thou wilt never see more, save to thy sorrow."

"Explain, woman," she almost shrieked, grasping her by the shoulders, and speaking with wild vehemence.

"Robert of Lester has become even as I have spoken. Maddened by thy coldness—his pride stung—his self-love wounded—his feelings lacerated, he has fled his home, and leagued himself with bucaniers."

"In the name of the blessed Heaven above, do you speak but a tithe of the truth, woman?" she demanded, with fearful emotion.

"He galloped to the seaside, and a Danish bucanier being by chance in shore, he threw himself on board, and put to sea with her."

"One word, only one word more! You saw this?"

"I did, and came hither to tell thee."

"Would to God I knew if thou didst tell the truth or no," she cried, almost sinking upon the ground.

"Behold this token which he gave me, bidding me return it to the giver, who, he said—mark the words, maiden!—was henceforth only worthy the scorn and contempt of the noble heart she had broken," spoke the false witch, taking, as if struck by a sudden thought, the locket and message from her bosom and placing it in her hands.

"It is too true. Merciful Heaven, sustain me! Nay! Elpsy, touch me not. I shall not fall. No, I *will* not fall! If—if he can scorn me—I—nay—do not support me—my pride will—will—oh—Lester, Lester—you have killed me!"

With a deep moan, as if her heart were bursting, she fell into the arms of the sorceress, who, not wholly unmoved by the wretchedness she had caused, placed her on one of the settees, and, with a look of triumph, gazed on her pale cheek, and watched the irregular and long-drawn heaving of her bosom. Her success had been complete, and she experienced a joy kindred to that of a fiend's when he beholds the fall of a good man. She had made the happy miserable, and was content! She had wounded the pride of the noble, and was satisfied. She had been the bearer of guilt to innocence, and her task was accomplished!

After surveying for a few moments the lovely victim of her malice and of her hatred of the high-born, which seemed to be placed deeper than any other feeling in her bosom, she drew from her bosom a small vial, and, removing the stopper, stooped over her and moistened her lips and nostrils. The volatile essence of the evaporating fluid was instantly inhaled, and produced a reviving effect. The colour returned to her cheek, and, opening her eyes, she fixed on the sorceress a wild gaze.

"It is not all a dream, then!" she cried, putting back her hair from her forehead and staring at

her; "she is there! Lester! is he—is he—oh—I cannot speak what I would—I remember—ah! I remember all. *She* told me so! Woman!" she all at once shrieked, "is thy tale false or true? Say it is not true," she added, rising and holding her by the cloak, "and I will fall down and kiss thy feet."

A triumphant light gleamed in the ruthless eyes of the sorceress. "Thou art humbled by grief," she said, with torturing coolness. "It is a pleasant thing to see the proud and high come down. Oh, if I had been noble too, as well as fair, in my youth, I had been a bride instead of—but I will not wound thine ears, maiden, with a word thou canst never know the meaning of. It is only for the lowborn virgin to be taught it by some high-born youth. What I have told thee is true. Robert of Lester has leagued himself with pirates. One day I may tell thee more of him."

"Hist!" she whispered, hoarsely. "I will hear no more of him. He is nothing now to Catharine of Bellamont. Hark, there is the sound of horses' feet! *He comes!* False one, he is here!" she cried, darting forward to the door of the pavilion.

Elpsy smiled grimly and followed her.

The sound of horsemen approaching was now distinctly heard, but it was the noise of many horses advancing at speed. In a few seconds they beheld emerge from the forest, not the form of Lester, but that of the Earl of Bellamont, attended by three or four mounted servants.

"Has Elpsy spoken the truth, maiden?" asked the sorceress, her eyes gleaming with the unpleasing smile habitual to her, when she observed Kate to turn her face away in disappointment.

"Torture me not, evil woman; thy words, whether false or true, have almost broken my heart."

At this instant the earl caught sight of his daughter, and, turning aside from the avenue, galloped across the lawn towards the pavilion. He was a gentleman of noble presence, with a dark, intelligent face, and dignified features. The resemblance between himself and daughter was instantly apparent. He rode with grace, and displayed admirable horsemanship in the management of his fiery steed.

"A kiss, my sweet child," he said, as he threw himself from his horse beside her. "You are abroad early! What, in tears? I have not been absent three days, and yet you welcome me, Kate, with as much emotion as if I had but returned from India. Nay, then, weep on my breast, silly one, if you will. What, Elpsy here too!" he exclaimed, now for the first time seeing the witch standing within the door of the pavilion—"I see it all. She has been alarming you with some evil foretellings! Woman, have I not forbidden thee to harbour or appear on the domains of Castle Cor? Moral blight and misfare follow thy footsteps as surely as does pestilence the path of the baleful dogstar. Depart!"

"I have done mine errand, proud earl, and therefore will go—but not at thy bidding I depart," she added, gathering her scarlet cloak about her hideous person.

"I care not if it be at the devil's—as it is most like to be—so I see thee no more! Cease, my dove, that moan. Her charms are sand—her words false—her prophecies the wildest dreams! Heed them not, if, as I suspect, she has filled thy tender ears with them."

"Thou lovest thy daughter, earl?" she said, interrogatively, as she prepared to depart.

"Too well to see her made miserable, vile sorceress!"

"See, then, thou do not make her so."

"How mean you?" he demanded.

"*Beware of a black plume!*" she added, mysteriously.

"Explain your meaning, woman!" he said, struck by her manner and the menacing tones in which she gave him this prophetic warning.

The sorceress made no reply; but, turning her face towards the path that led to the seashore, she rapidly traversed the lawn, and, waving her hand warningly, disappeared down the path leading to the beach.

The cause to which her father attributed her sudden and unwonted grief greatly relieved Kate; and by allowing him, through her silence, to retain the impression he had formed, she was saved the embarrassment of making him a confidant of her wounded affections by unfolding to him the true cause—a task, in her present state of mind, impossible for her to perform, and one which, at any time, would have been a sad trial to her maidenly sensitiveness. In a few moments she became more composed: the tide of her affections, which had been forced back upon the fountain-head, having found a channel in paternal love through which to flow, if not in the same direction as before, yet nearly in as deep and strong a current.

She accompanied him to the castle, and for the remainder of the morning was so occupied in forwarding the preparations for his departure and that of her cousin, that she had little time to devote to her own peculiar sorrows, leaving them for the lonely hours that would find her, after they were gone, in the solitary chamber, mourning over her crushed and blighted love. Yet a faint ray of the light of hope shone through the darkness of her heart, and the faintly-cherished belief that the tale

of the sorceress might be false kept her from abandoning herself to that hopelessness of grief, shame and utter wretchedness into which she would have sunk had the truth been made manifest to her, divested of every shadow of doubt.

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